RENÉ GUÉNON

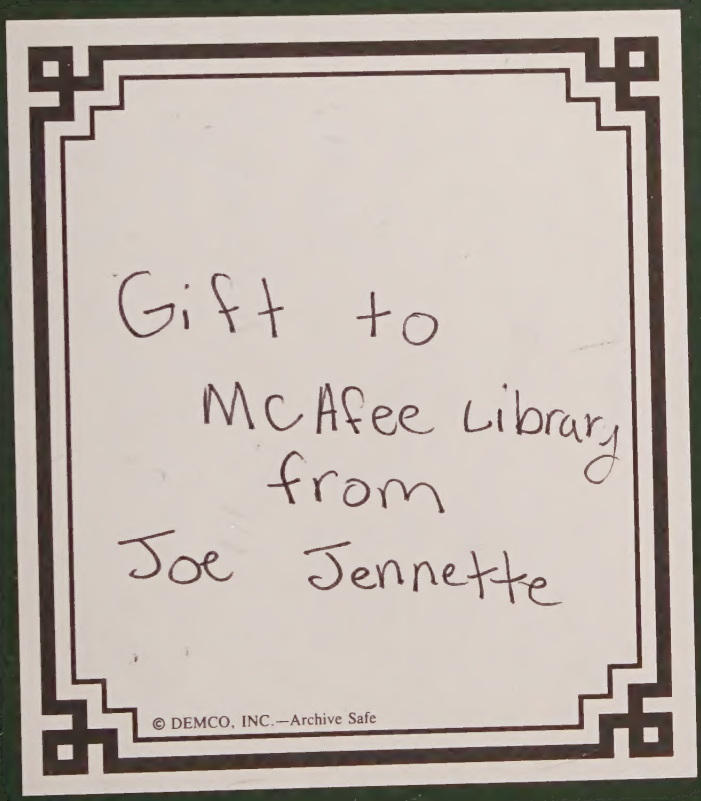
Fundamental Symbols

The Universal Language of Sacred Science

THIS LONG AWAITED VOLUME is presented here in English for the first time; and since it constitutes one of Guénon's greatest works, its publication must be counted as one of the great literary events of this century. To glance at the chapter headings is to be impressed by the wealth and variety of the contents—*The Science of Letters; Symbolic Weapons; The Wild Boar & the Bear; The Language of the Birds; The Bridge and the Rainbow*—are but a few of the 76 chapters. A striking aspect of the book is that it gives a new significance to so many of the objects, natural and man-made, with which we are inescapably surrounded in our daily life. Sensitive readers will be enriched by the immense perspective which is here offered them, both in time and space; and they will see the book above all as an introduction to the spiritual life, an introduction which fascinates and compels. For some souls it will open doors which no other key could unlock.

René Guénon is without doubt one of the colossal figures of this century whose fame only increases with the passing of days. In this work, probably the most significant in a modern Western language, concerning symbolism, Guénon deals with the metaphysical and cosmological meaning of symbols drawn from traditions as far apart as the Greek and the Buddhist, the Druid and the Islamic. This extensive work has been a real labour of love for both the translator, who has spent a life-time in the study of Guénon's work, and the editor (Martin Lings)*, himself one of the foremost traditional authors and a master of English prose. This is a major addition to the English corpus of Guénon's works.*

Seyyed Hossein Nasr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FUNDAMENTAL SYMBOLS

The Universal Language of Sacred Science

by

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MICHEL VĀLSAN

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QUINTA ESSENTIA

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All that exists, in whatever mode this may be, necessarily participates in universal principles, and nothing exists except by participation in these principles, which are the eternal and immutable essences contained in the permanent actuality of the Divine Intellect. Consequently, it can be said that all things, however contingent they may be in themselves, express or represent these principles in their own way and according to their order of existence, for otherwise they would be purely and simply nothingness. Thus, from one order to another, all things are linked together and correspond, to come together in total and universal harmony, for harmony is nothing other than the reflection of principial unity in the manifested world; and it is this correspondence which is the veritable basis of symbolism.

René Guénon, *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel*

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Introduction

Born in 1886, René Guénon, was the son of an architect in the conservative French Catholic milieu of Blois. The young Guénon proved to be a precocious if frail scholar, who by his twenty-first year was to abandon an apprenticeship in philosophy and mathematics and pursue instead, through the leadings of a former instructor, an acquisition of the kind of knowledge proffered in the labyrinths of Parisian occultist circles, at this period in full ferment.

It was just three years later that the opening numbers of a review called *La Gnose*, started in November 1909, presented the first article published by Guénon, entitled 'Le Demiurge'. This writing manifested a profound grasp of metaphysical principles, especially but not uniquely as related to the Hindu Advaita Vedānta. We know, however, from other articles of his that appeared in *La Gnose* until its demise in 1912, and from the titles of lectures (later to become titles of his books) he proposed to give at this period, that the French metaphysician was already essentially in possession of the life work to flow from his pen over the next forty years.

How can this be explained? Guénon, to be sure, benefited from an uncanny genius for relating back to their archetypal sources the shreds and fragments of traditional teachings seized upon by the occultist societies he frequented, whose errors were to be the target of his refutations in the years to come. But the catalyzing agent that would polarize his pneumatic disposition for the Truth into a real metaphysical adequacy was the contact Guénon had around the year 1908—and of which no details are known—with Hindus of the Advaita school. The crux of the message, presumably, which it was their destiny to transmit to the young Guénon as the providential receptacle for it, is what constitutes his own legacy to the West, being summed up by Frithjof Schuon as that of 'intellectuality, universality, tradition', the content of which subdivides into 'four great subjects: metaphysical doctrine, traditional principles, symbolism, critique of the modern world'.

Guénon felt only too clearly his isolation from the prevailing mentality, but he also knew still more clearly the inability of the 'opposition' to gain final ascendency over the Truth. 'All that we shall do or say', he wrote, 'will amount to giving those who come afterwards facilities which we ourself were not given; here, as everywhere else, it is the beginning of the work that is the most painful.'

He also wrote of himself that 'what we are intellectually we owe to the East alone'. Besides his contact with Hinduism, Guénon had direct access to Islamic esoterism and also certain connections with Taoism. He himself saw fit for manifold reasons to take Islam as his personal commitment to a spiritual form; but to the end of his days he wore a gold ring inscribed with the Sanskritic sacred monosyllable AUM, this being the highest *mantra* form of the Divine Name in Hinduism.

The first great response to Guénon's preparatory work came in the early thirties in the synthesizing effect it had on the vast erudition of Ananda Coomaraswamy, whose writings from there on would be the diffusion of manifold doctrines relating to the *philosophia perennis*, and whom Guénon would henceforth refer to as a 'collaborator'.

The second and integral fruition of his groundwork came with the arrival on the scene of the young Frithjof Schuon at about the same time as Coomaraswamy—the eldest of the three—and it was he who would give the message its quintessential form.

Whitall N. Perry

Editor's Foreword

The chapters of *Fundamental Symbols* were originally articles published in French journals, often consecutively, but not yet incorporated into books during the author's lifetime. The journals in question, now almost unobtainable, are indicated in the list of original sources towards the end of the book.

Our gratitude is due above all to Michel Vālsan for having put together this precious volume, and to Alvin Moore Jnr for having translated it from the original French edition of 1962. Thanks also to the translator, this English edition of what is one of Guénon's greatest works has been enriched by the addition of two more of his articles (chapters 2 and 3). On the other hand we have omitted one of the later chapters (71 of the French edition) which in our opinion should not have been included. The same applies to the also omitted closing paragraphs of chapter 6, which have nothing to do with symbolism and which raise certain problems that call for more annotations than we would venture to give. We are grateful to Richard Nicholson and Liadain Sherrard for their help in revising parts of the translation.

As to the notes which have been added throughout, they are placed between square brackets to distinguish them from Guénon's own notes. Of the bracketed notes, those without any specific attribution are by Michel Vālsan, whereas those that have been added to this English edition, except for mere references, are attributed to the translator or to the editor as the case may be.

The outstanding greatness of this book has two aspects, one that it shares with all that is best in Guénon's writing, and one that is unique. This latter aspect is the vision that it opens up to us of a remote past going beyond historic times. In some chapters we are conscious of breathing the fresh air of an almost primordial antiquity. The universal language of symbolism is as old as humanity; and the light which Guénon throws on the intelligence and the intellectual unanimity of the ancient world is enough to dispel forever any lingering illusions about primitive man that we have subconsciously retained from our education.

Against this background, we are not allowed to forget the messages which are at the root of Guénon's writing as a whole. It was his function, in a world increasingly rife with heresy and pseudo-religion, to remind twentieth-century man of the need for orthodoxy, which itself presupposes, firstly a

Divine Revelation, and secondly a tradition that hands down with fidelity, from generation to generation, what heaven has revealed. In this connection we are deeply indebted to him for having restored to 'orthodoxy' the full rigour of its original meaning, rectitude of opinion, rectitude which compels the intelligent man not merely to reject heresy but also to recognise the validity of all those faiths that conform to the above mentioned criteria on which his own faith depends for its orthodoxy.

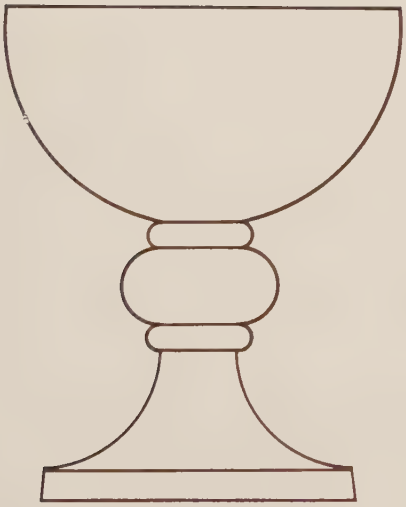
On the basis of this universality, often known as *religio perennis*, it was also Guénon's function to remind us that the great religions of the world are not only the means of man's salvation but that they offer him beyond that, even in this life, two esoteric possibilities which correspond to what were known in Greco-Roman antiquity as the Lesser Mysteries and the Greater Mysteries. The first of these is the way of return to the primordial perfection which was lost at the Fall; the second, which presupposes the first, is the way to Gnosis, the fulfilment of the precept *Gnōthi Seauton*, Know Thyself. This One Ultimate End is termed in Christianity *Deificatio*, in Hinduism *Yoga* (Union) and *Moksha* (Deliverance), in Buddhism *Nirvana* (Extinction—of all that is illusory), and in Islamic mysticism or Sufism *Taḥaqquq* (Realisation—glossed by a Sufi Saint as 'self-realisation in God').

The Mysteries are, explicitly, or implicitly,[1] the main theme of Guénon's writing, and the reader will see that *Fundamental Symbols* is very far from being an exception in this respect. Let it be simply added that in the domain of the sacred the science of sciences is metaphysics which, in its highest reaches, is theology in the literal sense of a study of the nature of God. Parallel to this are the higher reaches of philosophy, likewise in the literal sense, love of wisdom. But science, needless to say, is objective and, to be fully effective, it needs a response from the subject. The science of sciences demands to be fulfilled by its subjective counterpart which is, precisely, the passage through the Greater Mysteries, and symbols are fundamental according to the measure of their eloquence in expressing aspects of the Truth and of the Way.

Martin Lings

1. Even in *The Crisis of the Modern World* and *The Reign of Quantity* the troubles in question are shown to have sprung from the loss of the mysterial dimension.

Traditional Symbolism and Some of Its General Applications



1 § The Reform of the Modern Mentality[1]

MODERN civilisation appears in history as a veritable anomaly; of all those we know about, our own is the only one which has developed in a purely material sense, and is also the only one which is not supported by any principle of a higher order. This material development which has been pursued for several centuries now, and at an ever accelerating pace, has been accompanied by an intellectual regression which this same material progress is quite unable to neutralize. It is of course a genuine and true intellectuality which is in question here, which could also be called spirituality; for we refuse to give the name intellectuality to what is currently so called today, namely, the cultivation of the experimental sciences in view of the practical applications to which these sciences lend themselves. A single example will allow us to measure the extent of this regression: the *Summa Theologica* of St Thomas was, in its time, a manual for the use of students. Today, where are the students who would be capable of fathoming and assimilating it?

This decay has not come about all at once; one can follow its stages throughout modern philosophy. It is the loss or the forgetting of genuine intellectuality which has made possible two errors, apparently in opposition but in reality correlative and complementary: rationalism and sentimentalism. Once all purely intellectual knowledge had come to be denied or ignored as it has been since Descartes, the end was logically bound to be in positivism and agnosticism together with all manner of 'scientistic' aberrations, and on

1. [The journal *Regnabit* was founded by Rev Felix Anizan, OMI, in 1921, and this led in turn to the formation of a 'Society for the Intellectual Propagation of the Sacred Heart'. In its original appearance, this present chapter was Guénon's contribution to a one-day conference (6 May 1926) sponsored by the Society. Guénon wrote from a specifically Christian perspective for the purposes of his collaboration with *Regnabit* which, along with the above mentioned Society, was part of a pioneering effort to return to the genuine intellectual heritage of Christianity through the study and exposition of its traditional symbolism. Guénon, however, had to end his collaboration with *Regnabit* due to 'the hostility of certain neo-Scholastic circles'; and the journal itself ceased publication in 1929. Studies written by Guénon for *Regnabit* and reproduced here in whole or in part constitute ten chapters of the present book, while others were incorporated in other books by the author. Tr.]

the other hand in all those contemporary theories which, not content with what reason can bestow, seek for something else, but on the side of sentiment and instinct, that is, beneath reason and not above it, until with William James, for example, the point is reached at which the subconscious is conceived as the means by which man can communicate with the Divine. The notion of truth, after having been reduced to nothing more than a mere representation of sensible reality, is finally identified with utility by pragmatism, which amounts purely and simply to its suppression. For what is the importance of truth in a world whose aspirations are solely material and sentimental?

It is not possible to develop here all the consequences of such a state of affairs; we will simply point out some of those which relate more particularly to the religious perspective; and first of all, let it be noted that the contempt and repugnance that other peoples, especially Orientals, feel with regard to Westerners stem in large part from the fact that Westerners generally appear to them to be men without tradition, without religion, which in their eyes is a real monstrosity. An Oriental cannot admit a social organisation which does not rest upon traditional principles; for a Muslim, to take one example, legislation in its entirety is no more than a mere appendage of religion. It used to be so in the West also—we have only to think what Christianity was like in the Middle Ages; but today the relationships are reversed. Religion is now looked upon as nothing more than a social fact: instead of having the entire social order attached to it, religion is, on the contrary, no longer regarded as anything but just one element among those that constitute the social order, if indeed it is still allowed to hold there any place at all, and how many Catholics, alas, without the least difficulty, accept this way of viewing things. It is high time to react against this tendency, and in this respect the affirmation of the social Reign of Christ is a particularly opportune manifestation. But to make this a reality, today's mentality must be altogether reformed.

A blind eye must not be turned to the fact that even those who believe themselves to be sincerely religious have nothing, for the most part, but a greatly diminished idea of religion. It has hardly any actual influence on their behaviour or on their thought; it is as if separated from the rest of their existence. Practically, believers and unbelievers behave in almost the same way; for many Catholics, the affirmation of the supernatural has no more than a completely theoretical value, and they would be quite embarrassed to have to take note of a miracle. This is what might be called a practical or *de facto* materialism. Is it not still more dangerous than an avowed materialism, precisely because those whom it infects are not even aware of it?

On the other hand, religion for most people is only an affair of sentiment, without any intellectual import. Religion is confused with a vague religiosity, or is reduced to a morality. The function of doctrine is diminished as much as possible, despite the fact that it is the essential from which everything else ought to be but a logical consequence. In this respect Protestantism, which is on its way to becoming no more than a 'moralism' pure and simple, is very representative of the tendencies of the modern mind. But it

would be a great mistake to believe that Catholicism itself is not affected by these same tendencies, not in its principle, certainly, but in the way in which it is ordinarily presented. Under the pretext of making it acceptable to the contemporary mentality, the most disturbing concessions are made, concessions that encourage what on the contrary should be energetically fought against. We will not insist on the blindness of those who, under the pretext of 'tolerance', make themselves unconscious accomplices of counterfeits of religion, the hidden intentions of which they are far from suspecting. But in this connection, let us just note in passing the deplorable abuse which is frequently made of the word 'religion': is there not a ceaseless use of such expressions as 'religion of patriotism', 'religion of science', or 'religion of duty'? This is not simply carelessness in language; rather such abuses are symptomatic of the confusion that permeates the modern world. For in truth, language is a faithful representation of states of mind, and such expressions are incompatible with the true sense of religion.

But let us move on to what is more essential. We wish to speak of the weakness of doctrinal teaching, which is replaced almost entirely by vague moral and sentimental considerations. These developments may please some, but at the same time they can only rebuff and estrange those with any intellectual aspirations, of whom there are still some in our time in spite of everything. The proof of this is that more people than one might think deplore this lack of doctrine. A favourable sign, in spite of appearances, is the fact that this lack is now more widely recognized than it has been for some time. It is certainly wrong to claim, as we have often heard it claimed that nobody could understand an exposition of pure doctrine. First of all, why wish to remain on the lowest level on the pretext that it is that of the greatest number, as if it were necessary always to consider quantity rather than quality? Is not this a consequence of that democratic spirit which is one of the characteristic aspects of the modern mentality? Should it not be recognized that even those who would not understand everything would nevertheless derive a perhaps greater benefit from doctrinal exposition than might be supposed?

But the gravest obstacle is doubtless this kind of mistrust towards intellectuality that one generally finds in so many Catholic circles, even among ecclesiastics. We say gravest, because this mistrust is a mark of incomprehension that is to be found even among those on whom the task of teaching is incumbent. They have been touched by the spirit of modernity to the point of no longer knowing, any more than the philosophers named above, the nature of true intellectuality, to the point, at times of confounding intellectuality with rationalism and thus unintentionally playing the game of the enemy. We think that what is important above all else is precisely the restoration of true intellectuality and with it the sense of doctrine and of tradition. It is high time to show that religion is something other than a matter of sentimental devotion, something other than mere moral precepts, or the consolations available to souls weakened by suffering, and that one can find in it that 'solid nourishment' of which St Paul speaks in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

We know well enough that this goes against certain fixed habits that are difficult to throw off; but nevertheless, it is not a question of innovation—far from it—but on the contrary of returning to the tradition that has been strayed from, of finding again what has been all too willingly lost. Would this not be better than making the most unjustified concessions to the modern mind, such as are to be found, for example, in so many apologetical works that strive to reconcile dogma with all that is most hypothetical and least well founded in current science, an effort that has to be repeated all over again whenever these so-called scientific theories are replaced by others? It would, however, be quite easy to show that religion and science are not really in conflict, for the simple reason that they do not concern the same domain. Why is there no perception of the danger of even seeming to seek corroboration, in what is most changeable and most uncertain, for doctrine that concerns immutable and unchangeable truths? And what is one to think of those Catholic theologians who are so affected by the 'scientistic' mentality that they feel obliged to take into account, in more or less large measure, the results of modern exegesis and 'textual criticism', when it would be so easy, for anyone who had just a reasonably sure doctrinal foundation, to show their inanity? How can one not see that the so-called 'science of religions', such as it taught in the universities, has never been anything else in reality but an instrument of war directed against religion and, more generally, against all that may still subsist of the traditional spirit, which those who are guiding the modern world in a direction that can only end in catastrophe naturally want to destroy?

There is much more that could be said on all this, but we only wanted to indicate very summarily a few of the points about which a reform is urgently necessary; and now to conclude with a question that is of especial interest to us in this domain, why is there so much more or less avowed hostility towards symbolism? Assuredly, because it is a mode of expression that has become entirely foreign to the modern mentality, and because man is naturally prone to distrust what he does not understand. Symbolism is the means best adapted to the teaching of higher religious and metaphysical truths, that is, of all that the modern mind spurns or neglects. Symbolism is entirely contrary to rationalism, and all its adversaries behave, some without even being aware of it, as true rationalists. For our part, we think that if symbolism is not understood today, this is one more reason to insist upon it, expounding as completely as possible the real significance of traditional symbols by restoring to them all their intellectual meaning instead of making them simply a theme of sentimental exhortations—for which, moreover, the use of symbolism is quite pointless.

This reform of the modern mentality, with all that it implies, namely the restoration of true intellectuality and of traditional doctrine, which for us are inseparable from one another—this certainly is a considerable task. But is that a reason for not undertaking it? It seems to us, on the contrary, that such a task constitutes one of the highest and most important ends

that can be proposed for the activity of a society such as the Society for the Intellectual Propagation of the Sacred Heart, so much the more in that all the efforts accomplished in this direction will necessarily be orientated towards the Heart of the Incarnate Word, the spiritual Sun and Centre of the World, 'in which are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and science', not of that empty, profane science which is the only one known to most of our contemporaries, but of the veritable sacred science which opens, to those who study it in the proper way, unsuspected and truly unlimited horizons.

2 § Spirit and Intellect

IT is frequently affirmed that Spirit is not other than *Ātmā*, but nevertheless there are instances when this same Spirit seems to be identified only with *Buddhi*. Is there not something contradictory here? It would be insufficient to see in this a simple question of terminology, for if such were the case one might as well go further and accept indiscriminately the many more or less vague and incorrect meanings commonly given to the word 'spirit', instead of carefully avoiding them, as we have always endeavoured to do; and the only too evident inadequacy of western languages for expressing metaphysical ideas is no reason, to say the least, for not taking all the precautions necessary to avoid confusions. What justifies these two uses of the same word—let us state it at the outset—is the correspondence which exists between different levels of reality and which makes possible the transposition of certain terms from one of these levels to another.

The case in question is comparable to that of the word 'essence', which can also be used in several different ways. Insofar as it is the correlative of 'substance', and from the point of view of universal manifestation, it designates *Purusha* in relation to *Prakriti*. But it can be transposed beyond this duality, and such is necessarily the case when one speaks of the 'Divine Essence', even if, as usually happens in the West, those who use this expression do not go beyond pure Being in their conception of the Divinity.[1] Similarly, one can speak of the essence of a being as complementary to its substance, but one can also designate as essence that which constitutes the ultimate, immutable and unconditioned reality of that being; and the reason is that the first is in the final analysis nothing other than the expression of the second in regard to manifestation. Now if it be said that the spirit of a being is the

1. The use of the term *Purushottama* in the Hindu tradition implies precisely the same transposition in relation to that which *Purusha* designates in its more common sense.

same as its essence, this can also be understood in both the one and the other of the two senses; and from the point of view of absolute reality, spirit or essence obviously is not and cannot be anything other than *Ātmā*. It must however be noted that *Ātmā*, comprising within itself principially all reality, cannot for that very reason enter into correlation with anything whatsoever. Thus, as long as it is a question of the constitutive principles of a being in its conditioned states, what is called spirit, as for example in the ternary 'spirit, soul and body', can no longer be the unconditioned *Ātmā*, but only that which most directly represents it in manifestation. We could add that this is not even the essence in correlation with substance, for if it be true that substance implies manifestation it is nevertheless not itself within manifestation. Strictly speaking, therefore, the spirit in this sense can only be the first and loftiest of all manifested principles, that is, *Buddhi*.

It is thus necessary, from the point of view of a state of manifestation such as the individual human state, to introduce what might be called a question of 'perspective'; when we speak of the universal, distinguishing it from the individual, we must here understand not only the unmanifested, but also that which in manifestation itself is supra-individual, that is, supraformal manifestation to which *Buddhi* essentially belongs. Similarly, with regard to the individuality as such, including as it does the entirety of the psychic and corporeal elements, we can only designate as spiritual the principles that transcend the individuality, which again is precisely the case with *Buddhi* or the intellect. This is why we can say, as we often have, that for us pure intellectuality and spirituality are ultimately synonymous. Moreover, the Intellect itself can also be transposed, in the same way as the spirit, for it is generally considered altogether admissible to speak of the 'Divine Intellect'. In this connection, we will note again that even though the *gunas* are inherent in *Prakriti*, *sattwa* can only be considered as a spiritual (or 'spiritualising') tendency because it is the tendency that orients the being towards the higher states. We have here a consequence of the same 'perspective' which counts the supra-individual states as intermediary degrees between the human state and the unconditioned state, though between the unconditioned and any conditioned state whatsoever, even the most elevated of all, there is really no common measure.[2]

What must be emphasized is the essentially supra-individual nature of the pure Intellect. Moreover, it is only what belongs to this superhuman order that can be called truly transcendent, since this term cannot normally be applied except to what lies beyond the individual domain. The Intellect, therefore, is never individualised; furthermore, this corresponds to what is expressed, considering now more particularly the corporeal world, when it is said that whatever the appearances may be, the Spirit is never 'incarnated', which is equally true in all senses wherein the word 'spirit' can be

2. Cf., Frithjof Schuon, 'Des modes de la réalisation spirituelle', *Etudes Traditionnelles*, April–May 1947, p. 119, note. 3.

legitimately used.[3] It follows that the distinction which exists between the Spirit and elements of the individual order are much more profound than all those which can be established among these individual elements themselves, as for example between the psychic and corporeal elements, that is, between those which belong respectively to subtle and gross manifestation, both of which are no more than modalities of formal manifestation.[4]

But this is still not all. Not only does *Buddhi*, insofar as it is the first of the productions of *Prakriti*, constitute the link between all the states of manifestation, but from another angle and looking at things from a principial viewpoint, *Buddhi* appears as the luminous ray emanating from the Spiritual Sun, which is *Ātmā* itself. One can say, therefore, that *Buddhi* is also the first manifestation of *Ātmā*[5] even though it must be clearly understood that *Ātmā* itself remains unmanifest, not being affected or modified by any contingency.[6] Now light is essentially one and is not of a different nature in the Sun and in the Sun's rays, which are not distinct from it except in an illusory mode as far as the Sun itself is concerned (although this distinction is none the less real for the eye which perceives the rays and which here represents the being situated within manifestation).[7] By reason of this essential 'connaturality', *Buddhi*, in the final analysis, is not other than the expression of *Ātmā* in the manifested order. This luminous ray which links all the states together is also represented symbolically as the 'breath' by which they subsist—which, as one will note, is in strict conformity with the etymological sense of the words designating Spirit (whether this be the Latin *spiritus* or the Greek *pneuma*); and as we have already explained on other occasions, it is strictly speaking the *sūtrātmā*, which amounts to saying that it is really *Ātmā* itself or, more precisely, it is the appearance which *Ātmā* takes from the moment that, instead of considering only the Supreme Principle (which would then be represented as the Sun containing in itself all the rays in an indistinguished state), we consider the manifested states also. This appearance, moreover, is such only from the point of view of the beings within the manifested states; and it is this appearance which seems to give to the ray an existence distinct

3. One can even say that it is this which marks, quite generally, the clearest and the most important distinction between these senses and the illegitimate ones which are too often attributed to this same word.

4. This is also why, strictly speaking, a man cannot speak of 'his Spirit' as he speaks of 'his soul' or 'his body', the possessive implying that it is a question of an element belonging strictly to the individual order. In the ternary division of the elements of the being, the individual as such is composed of soul and body, while the Spirit (without which it could not exist in any manner) is transcendent in relation to it.

5. Cf., *The Great Triad* (René Guénon), p. 77, note 4.

6. According to the Upanishadic formula, he is 'That by which everything is manifested, which is not itself manifested by anything'.

7. Light is the traditional symbol of the very nature of the Spirit; we have remarked elsewhere that one also finds, in this respect, the expressions 'spiritual light' and 'intelligible light', as if they were in some way synonymous which, again, obviously implies an assimilation between Spirit and Intellect.

from its source, for it is evident that the 'exteriority' of the manifested states in relation to the Principle can only be altogether illusory.

The immediate conclusion which results from these considerations is that as long as the being is not only in the human state but in any manifested state whatsoever, individual or supra-individual, there can be for him no real difference between Spirit and Intellect, nor consequently between true spirituality and true intellectuality. In other words, in order to reach the final and supreme goal, there is for such a being no other way than the ray itself by which the being is attached to the Spiritual Sun. Whatever the apparent diversity of ways that exist at the outset, they all must be united sooner or later in this one 'axial' way, and when the being has followed this way to its end, he 'will enter into his own Self', from which he had never departed except by illusion. For the Self, which analogically is called Spirit, Essence, or some other choice of name, is identical with the Absolute Reality in which all is contained, that is, with supreme and unconditioned *Ātmā*.

3 § The Eternal Ideas

In the last chapter we remarked, with regard to the assimilation of Spirit to Intellect, that it is considered altogether admissible to speak of the 'Divine Intellect', which obviously implies a transposition of the term beyond the domain of manifestation. But this point calls for further attention, for it is precisely here that is to be found the very basis for the assimilation in question. We will note at the outset that, in this respect also, standpoints can be taken at different levels, according to whether one stops short at the consideration of Being alone or whether one goes beyond Being. Needless to say, when theologians consider the Divine Intellect or the Word as the 'place of Possibilities', they have in view possibilities of manifestation only, which as such are comprised in Being. The transposition which permits the passage from Being to the Supreme Principle no longer pertains to the domain of theology, but solely to pure metaphysics.

It might be asked if this conception of the Divine Intellect and that of the 'intelligible world' of Plato are identical; or, in other words, whether the 'Ideas' understood in a Platonic sense, are the same as those contained eternally in the Word. It is clearly a question of the 'archetypes' of manifested beings in both cases. It would seem, however, at least at first glance, that the 'intelligible world' corresponds to supraformal manifestation rather than to pure Being; in other words, according to Hindu terminology, it would be *Buddhi* envisaged in the Universal order rather than *Ātmā*, even in a

perspective that limits *Ātmā* to pure Being. It goes without saying that both these points of view are perfectly legitimate.[1] But if such is the case, the Platonic 'ideas' cannot strictly be called 'eternal', because this word cannot be applied to anything that belongs to manifestation, even at its loftiest degree and at the level closest to the Principle, while the ideas contained in the Word are necessarily eternal as He is, everything in the Principial order being absolutely permanent and admitting no kind of succession.[2] Notwithstanding this, it seems to us probable that the passage from one of these points of view to the other must always have remained possible for Plato himself, as indeed it is in reality. We will not insist on this further, however, preferring to leave to others the task of examining this question more closely, the interest of which is after all more historical than doctrinal.

What is rather strange is that some people seem to consider the eternal ideas as mere 'virtualities' in relation to the manifested beings of which these ideas are actually the principial archetypes. There is an illusion here which is no doubt due to the profane distinction between the 'possible' and the 'real', a distinction which, as we have explained elsewhere,[3] could not have the least value from a metaphysical perspective. This illusion is all the more grave in that it involves a genuine contradiction, and it is difficult to understand why it is not perceived. In fact, there can be nothing virtual whatsoever in the Principle, but on the contrary, only the permanent actuality of all things in an 'eternal present'; and it is this actuality which constitutes the sole basis of all existence. Nevertheless, there are those who carry the mistake so far that they seem to look on the eternal ideas only as kinds of images—which, let it be noted in passing, implies yet another contradiction, that of seeking to introduce something of a formal nature even into the Principle—images that have, with manifested beings themselves, a relation that is no more real than would be their image reflected in a mirror. That is, strictly speaking, a complete reversal of the relationship of the Principle with manifestation, and it is too obvious to need further explanation. The truth is indeed remote from these erroneous conceptions. The *idea* in question here is the very principle of the being: it is that which gives it all its reality and without which it would be only nothingness

1. Perhaps it is not without interest to mention that the 'idea' or the 'archetype', considered at the level of supraformal manifestation and in relation to each being, corresponds in fact, despite the different mode of expression, to the Catholic conception of the 'guardian angel'. [In the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas, creatures come forth from God firstly into angelic intellect, and secondly into individual existence. Tr.]

2. We do not distinguish here between the domain of Being and That which is beyond, for it is obvious that possibilities of manifestation, viewed especially as they are contained in Being, do not really differ in any way from these same possibilities in so far as they are contained along with all others in Total Possibility. All the difference is only in the viewpoint or 'level' at which one places oneself, according to whether or not one considers these possibilities in relation to manifestation itself.

3. See *The Multiple States of Being*, ch. 2.

pure and simple. To maintain the contrary amounts to severing all links between the manifested being and the Principle; and if at the same time a real existence be attributed to this being, this existence is and cannot be anything other than independent of the Principle so that, as we have said on another occasion,[4] it all inevitably ends in the error of 'association'. Once it is recognised that the existence of manifested beings, in all their positive reality, can only be a 'participation' in principial Being, then there cannot be the least doubt about this matter. If the 'participation' and the asserted 'virtuality' of the eternal ideas should both be admitted at the same time, that would be yet another contradiction. In fact, what is virtual is in no way our reality in the Principle, but only the consciousness we have of it as manifested beings, which obviously is something altogether different; and it is only by metaphysical realisation that our consciousness of our true being, which is beyond and above all becoming, can be made effective, that is, actualised into the consciousness not of something that might pass from 'potency' to 'act', but rather of that which we are principially and eternally, and this in the most absolutely real sense possible.

Now to relate what we have said about the eternal ideas to that which concerns the manifested Intellect, we must naturally turn once again to the *sūtrātmā* doctrine, however it may be expressed, for the different symbolisms traditionally used for this purpose are basically equivalent. Returning, then, to the representation we used previously, it can be said that the Divine Intellect is the Spiritual Sun, while the manifested intellect is a ray[5] of the Sun; and there can be no more discontinuity between the Principle and manifestation than there is between the Sun and its rays.[6] It is by the Intellect, therefore, that every being in all its states of manifestation, is attached directly to the Principle, and this is because the Principle, insofar as it eternally contains the 'truth' of all beings, is itself not other than the Divine Intellect.[7]

4. See below, 'The Roots of Plants' [64].

5. Moreover, this ray will be single in so far as *Buddhi* is envisaged in the Universal order (it is then the 'sole foot of the Sun' of which the Hindu tradition speaks), but it is multiplied indefinitely in appearance in relation to particular beings (the *sushumna* ray by which each being, in whatever state it may be situated, is permanently linked to the Spiritual Sun).

6. It is these rays which, according to the symbolism we have used elsewhere, realise manifestation in 'measuring' it by their actual expansion from the Sun (see *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 3).

7. In terms of the Islamic tradition, *al-ḥaqīqah* or the 'truth' of every being whatsoever lies in the Divine Principle inasmuch as this Principle is itself *al-Ḥaqq* or the 'Truth' in the absolute sense.

4 § Word and Symbol[1]

We have previously had occasion to speak of the importance of symbolic forms in the transmission of traditional doctrinal teachings.[2] We return to this subject in order to bring to it some complementary explanations and to show yet more explicitly the different points of view from which it can be looked at.

First of all, symbolism seems to us to be quite specially adapted to the needs of human nature, which is not exclusively intellectual but which needs a sensory basis from which to rise to higher levels. The human composite must be taken as it is, simultaneously one and multiple in its real complexity; this is what tends to be forgotten ever since Descartes claimed to establish a radical and absolute separation between soul and body. Pure intelligences which are nothing other than intelligence certainly need no outward form and no expression in order to understand the truth, nor do they need them even for communicating to other pure intelligences what has been understood in the measure that this is communicable; but it is not so for man. Fundamentally, every expression, every formulation, whatever it may be, is a symbol of the thought which it expresses outwardly. In this sense, language itself is nothing other than symbolism. There can be no opposition, therefore, between the use of words and the use of figurative symbols; rather, these two modes of expression should be complementary one to another (moreover, they may in fact be combined, for primitively writing is ideographic and sometimes, as in China, it has always retained this characteristic). Generally speaking, the form of language is analytical and 'discursive', as is human reason of which it is the true and fitting instrument and the flow of which it reproduces as exactly as possible. On the contrary, symbolism in the strict sense is essentially synthetic and thereby as it were intuitive, which makes it more apt than language to serve as a support for intellectual intuition which is above reason, and which must not be confused with that lower intuition to which numerous contemporary philosophers so often refer. Consequently, if one is not content merely to note a difference and if one wishes to speak of superiority, this superiority, whatever some may claim, will lie with synthetic symbolism which opens the way to truly unlimited conceptual possibilities. Language, on the contrary, fraught as it is with more definite and less supple meanings, always sets more or less narrow limits for the understanding.

Therefore let no one say that symbolism is good only for the common man;

1. [Published in *Regnabit*, January 1926, with reference to an article by the Rev Felix Anizan entitled, 'If We Knew How to Look' (in the November 1925 issue of the same journal), which insisted particularly on the importance and the value of the symbol of the Sacred Heart.]

2. [Cf., *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, Part II, chapter 7; and *L'Esoterisme de Dante*, 1925 (and later editions). After writing this present article, René Guénon often returned, in other books and articles, to the doctrine on which symbolism is based, especially in *The Symbolism of the Cross*, and in *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, ch. 16–18.]

it would be true to say the opposite; or better still, symbolism is equally good for all, because it helps everyone to understand the truth in question more or less completely and more or less profoundly, each according to the nature of his intellectual possibilities. It is thus that the highest truths, which would not be communicable or transmissible by any other means, can be communicated up to a certain point when they are, so to speak, incorporated in symbols which will hide them for many, no doubt, but which will manifest them in all their splendour to the eyes of those who can see.

Does this amount to saying that the use of symbols is a necessity? A distinction must be made here: as such and in an absolute way, no outward form is necessary; all are equally contingent and accidental in relation to that which they express or represent. Thus, according to the teachings of the Hindus, any figure, a statue for example which symbolizes this or that aspect of the Divinity, must be considered only as a 'support', a reference point for meditation. It is therefore simply an aid and nothing more. A Vedic text makes a comparison in this respect which perfectly clarifies the function of symbols and of outward forms in general: these forms are like the horse which enables a man to make a journey more rapidly and with much less trouble than if he had to go on foot. No doubt, if this man did not have a horse at his disposal he could, in spite of everything, reach his goal; but with how much more difficulty! If he could avail himself of a horse it would indeed be a mistake to refuse it on the pretext that it is more worthy not to have recourse to any aid. Do not the detractors of symbolism act precisely in this way? And though there is never an absolute impossibility of making the journey on foot, however long and difficult it be, there may none the less exist a truly practical impossibility of reaching the goal in this way. It is thus with rites and symbols: they are not necessary in an absolute sense; but they are, as it were, indispensable by a necessity of convenience or expediency, given the conditions of human nature.[3]

But it is not enough to consider symbolism from the human side as we have been doing up to this point. To be fully understood, it must be looked at as well, if one may say so, from the divine side. Already, once it be accepted that symbolism has its basis in the very nature of beings and things, that it is in perfect conformity with the laws of this nature, and if it be borne in mind that natural laws are basically only an expression and as it were an exteriorisation of the divine Will—does this not authorize us to affirm that symbolism is of 'non-human' origin, as the Hindus say; or in other words, that its principle goes further back and higher than humanity?

It is not without reason that, in reference to symbolism, the first words of St

3. [A parallel text of St Thomas Aquinas can be cited: 'A thing may be necessary to a given end in two ways. First, as that without which it is absolutely impossible to attain the end: thus nourishment is necessary in order to conserve life. In another way, as that by which one better and more conveniently attains this end; thus the horse is necessary for travel' (*Summa Theologica* III, q 1, a 2). This caused the Rev Anizan to write: '*Sicut equus necessarius est ad iter*, say the *Vedas* and the *Summa Theologica*' (*Regnabit*, November 1925)]

John's Gospel have been quoted.[4] 'In the beginning was the Word'. The Word, the Logos, is at once Thought and Word; in Himself, He is the Divine Intellect, which is the 'place of possibilities'; in relation to us, He is manifested or expressed by Creation, in which are realised in actual existence certain of those possibilities which, as essences, are contained in Him from all eternity. Creation is the work of the Word; it is also, and by this very fact, His manifestation, his outward affirmation; and this is why the world is like a divine language for those who know how to understand it: *Caeli enarrant gloriam Dei* (The heavens declare the glory of God, *Ps.* XIX: 2). The philosopher Berkeley was not wrong, therefore, when he said that the world is 'the language that the infinite Spirit speaks to finite spirits'; but he was wrong to believe that this language is only a collection of arbitrary signs, for in reality there is nothing arbitrary even in human language, every signification at the origin necessarily having its basis in some natural conformity or harmony between the sign and the signified. It is because Adam had received from God the knowledge of the nature of all living beings that he was able to give them their names (*Genesis* II: 19, 20); and all the ancient traditions are in agreement that the true name of a being is one with its nature or its very essence.

If the Word is Thought inwardly and Word outwardly, and if the world is the result of the Divine Word offered at the beginning of time, then nature in its entirety can be taken as a symbol of supernatural reality. Everything that exists, whatever its mode, having its principle in the Divine Intellect, translates or represents this principle in its own way and according to its own order of existence; and thus, from one order to another, all things are linked and correspond with each other so that they cooperate towards the universal and total harmony, which is like a reflection of the divine Unity itself. This correspondence is the veritable basis of symbolism and this is why the laws of a lower domain can always be taken to symbolise realities of a higher order, where they have the profound reason for their existence, the cause which is both their principle and their end. Let us call attention to the error of the modern 'naturalistic' interpretations of ancient traditional doctrines, interpretations which purely and simply reverse the hierarchy of relationships between the different orders of reality. For example, symbols or myths have never had the function of representing the movement of the stars. The truth, rather, is that one often finds therein figures that are inspired by these movements and destined to express analogically something altogether different, because the laws of the movements of the heavens express physically the metaphysical principles on which they depend. The lower can symbolise the higher, but the inverse is impossible. Moreover, if the symbol was not itself nearer the sensible order than what it represents, how could it fulfil the function for which it is destined? In nature the sensible can symbolise the suprasensible; the natural order in its entirety can in its turn be a symbol of

4. [The Rev Anizan at the beginning of the article in *Regnabit*, November 1925.]

the divine order. On the other hand, to consider more particularly man himself, is it not legitimate to say that he also is a symbol by the very fact that he is 'created in the image of God' (*Genesis* I, 26, 27)? Let us add that nature is given its full significance only if it is looked at as offering us a means of rising up to the knowledge of divine truths, which is precisely the essential function which we have recognized in symbolism.[5]

These considerations could be developed almost indefinitely, but we prefer to leave to each one the responsibility of making this development by an effort of personal reflection, for nothing could be more profitable. Like the symbols which are their theme, these notes should only serve as a starting point for meditation. Moreover, words can express only imperfectly what there is question of here. Nevertheless there is still an aspect of the question—and not one of the least importance—that we shall now briefly try to make clear or at least provide a glimpse of.

The Divine Word is expressed in Creation, we said, and this is comparable, analogically speaking and bearing in mind all due proportions, to thought being expressed in forms (there is no longer need here to distinguish between language and symbolism in this strict sense) which at one and the same time veil and manifest it. The primordial revelation which is, like Creation, a work of the Word, is itself incorporated, so to speak, in symbols which have been transmitted from age to age ever since the origin of humanity; and this process, too, is analogous to that of Creation itself. On the other hand, can one not see in this incorporation into symbols of the 'non-human' tradition, a kind of anticipated image, a kind of 'prefiguration' of the incarnation of the Word? And does this not also enable us to see, in a certain measure, the mysterious relationship existing between the Creation and the incarnation which is its consummation?

We will end by a last remark relative to the importance of the universal symbol of the Heart and more particularly of the form which it takes in the Christian tradition, that of the Sacred Heart. If symbolism in its essence conforms strictly to the 'divine plan', and if the Sacred Heart is the centre of the being, both really and symbolically, this symbol of the Heart, itself or in its equivalents, must occupy a central place[6] in all doctrines issuing more or

5. Perhaps it would be useful to note that this point of view, according to which nature is considered a symbol of the supernatural, is in no way new and that on the contrary it was widely entertained in the Medieval period. It was, for example, that of the Franciscan school, and in particular of St Bonaventura. Let it be noted also that analogy, in the Thomistic sense of the word, which allows one to ascend from the knowledge of creatures to that of God is nothing but a symbolic mode of expression based on the correspondence between the natural and the supernatural orders.

6. [The author added here a reference to the quite central place occupied by the heart in the middle of the planetary and zodiacal circles in an astronomical carving of Saint-Denis d'Orques (Sarthe), which was sculpted by a Carthusian towards the end of the fifteenth century. The figure had been previously reproduced by L. Charbonneau-Lassay in *Regnabit*, February 1924; see also *Le Bestiaire du Christ*, p. 102 (Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1940). This will be discussed further in ch. 71.]

less directly from the Primordial Tradition. It is this that we will try to show in some of the studies which follow.[7]

5 § The Sacred Heart and the Legend of the Holy Grail

IN his article, 'The Ancient Iconography of the Heart of Jesus',[1] Monsieur Charbonneau-Lassay very aptly calls our attention to the legend of the Holy Grail as something belonging to what might be called the 'prehistory of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus', namely, the Grail legend which was committed to writing in the twelfth century, though in its origins it is much earlier, being in reality a Christian adaptation of very ancient Celtic traditions. The idea of this comparison had already occurred to us, occasioned by an earlier article (and one of great interest from our point of view), 'The Human Heart and the Notion of the Heart of God in the Religion of Ancient Egypt',[2] from which we cite the following passage: 'In their hieroglyphs, sacred writing wherein the image of the thing itself often represents the very word that designates it, the heart was none the less depicted only by an emblem: the *vase*. Is not the heart of man in fact the vase in which his life is continuously maintained by means of his blood?' It is this vase taken as symbol of the heart and standing for it in ancient Egyptian ideography, which made us think immediately of the Holy Grail, the more so because in the case of the Grail, beyond the general sense of the symbol (considered simultaneously under both its divine and human aspects), we see also a special and very much more direct relationship with the Heart of Christ himself. Indeed, the Holy Grail is the cup which contains the precious blood of Christ and which even holds it twice, having been used first at the Last Supper and then when Joseph of Arimathea collected in it the blood and water which flowed from the wound opened in the Redeemer's side, the wound made by the centurion's lance. In a way, therefore, this cup stands for the Heart of Christ as receptacle of his blood; it takes its place, so to speak, and becomes its symbolic equivalent, and is it not still more remarkable, under these

7. [René Guénon had already discussed the heart as centre of the being, and more especially as 'abode of Brahma' or 'residence of *Ātmā*' in *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta* (1925); in the context of *Regnabit*, where he never made references to his works on Hinduism, he took up this subject again.]

1. [*Regnabit*, June 1925.]
2. [Ibid, November 1924. Cf., Charbonneau-Lassay, *Le Bestiaire du Christ*, ch. 10, p. 95.]

conditions, that of old the vase had already been an emblem of the heart? Moreover, the cup, under one form or another, plays an important part, as does the heart itself, in many ancient traditions; and so it was no doubt in particular with the Celts, for it is from them that the very core, or at least the warp of the legend of the Holy Grail has come down to us. It is to be regretted that we can know so little about the precise form of that tradition as it existed prior to Christianity, and the same applies to all that can be known of Celtic doctrine, for which oral teaching was always the sole means of transmission. But there is enough inter-religious concordance to enable us at least to establish the significance of the chief symbols which figured in those doctrines, and it is this after all which is most essential.

But let us return to the legend in the form in which it has come down to us. What it says of the origin of the Grail is particularly worthy of attention: angels had fashioned the cup from an emerald which dropped from the forehead of Lucifer at the time of his fall. This emerald recalls in a striking manner the *urnā*, the frontal pearl which in Hindu iconography often takes the place of the third eye of Shiva, representing what may be called the 'sense of eternity'. This comparison seems to us more apt than any other to clarify perfectly the symbolism of the Grail; and it shows us yet another relationship with the heart, which is for the Hindu tradition as for so many others (though perhaps even more so in Hinduism) the centre of the integral being and consequently the organ to which the 'sense of eternity' must be directly attached.

The legend goes on to say that the Grail was entrusted to Adam in the earthly Paradise but that at the time of his fall, Adam in turn lost it as he could not carry it with him when he was driven out from Eden; and that is also made very clear by the meaning we have just indicated. Man, separated from his original Centre by his own fault, finds himself henceforth confined to the temporal sphere; he can no longer regain the single point from which all things are contemplated from the aspect of eternity. The terrestrial Paradise was, in fact, the true 'Centre of the World', which is everywhere symbolically assimilated to the Divine Heart; and can it not be said that Adam, as long as he was in Eden, truly lived in the Heart of God?

What follows is more enigmatic: Seth was able to return to the terrestrial Paradise and thus was able to recover the precious vase. Now Seth is one of those who stand for the Redeemer, the more so in that his name expresses the ideas of foundation and stability, and in a way announces the restoration of the primordial order destroyed by the fall of man. Thus there was henceforth at least a partial restoration, in the sense that Seth and those who after him possessed the Grail were able thereby to establish, somewhere on earth, a spiritual centre which was the image of the lost Paradise. Furthermore the legend does not say where or by whom the Grail was preserved until the time of Christ, or how its transmission was assured; but the admittedly Celtic origin of the legend points to the probability that the Druids had a part in this, and that they must be numbered among the regular maintainers of the Primordial Tradition. In any case, the existence of such a spiritual

centre, or even of several centres—simultaneously or successively—cannot be questioned, wherever we may suppose them to have been located. What must be noted is that among other designations, that of 'Heart of the World' is always and everywhere attached to these centres, and that in all traditions the descriptions that relate thereto are based on an identical symbolism which it is possible to follow down to the most precise details. Does this not show sufficiently well that the Grail (or that which is thus represented) already had, prior to Christianity and even from all time, the closest of connections with the Divine Heart and with Emmanuel,[3] that is, with the manifestation of the Eternal Word in the bosom of terrestrial humanity, a manifestation which might be virtual or real, according to the times, but which was always present?

After the death of Christ, according to the legend, the Holy Grail was brought to Britain by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Then began to unfold the history and exploits of the Knights of the Round Table, which we cannot follow here. The Round Table was destined to receive the Grail when one of the Knights should have succeeded in winning it and bringing it from Britain to Armorica;[4] and this Table is also probably a very ancient symbol, one of those associated with the idea of the above mentioned spiritual centres. The circular form of the Table relates to the 'zodiacal cycle' (itself a symbol which deserves special study) by the presence around it of twelve principal personages, a particularity which is to be found in the make-up of all the centres in question. That being so, cannot one see in the number of twelve Apostles one sign, among a multitude of others, of the perfect conformity of Christianity with the Primordial Tradition, to which the name 'prechristianity' is so exactly suited? And on the other hand, in connection with the Round Table, we have noted[5] a strange concordance in the symbolic revelations made to Marie des Vallées,[6] wherein is mentioned a 'round table of jasper which represents the Heart of our Lord', while at the same time there is mention of 'a garden which is the Holy Sacrament of the Altar', and which with its 'four fountains of living water', is mysteriously identified with the Earthly Paradise. Is not this a striking and unexpected confirmation of the relationships that we have pointed out above?

Naturally, we cannot claim that these all too hasty notes constitute a complete study of a question so little known as this, and we must limit ourselves here to mere indications. We are well aware that in all this there are considerations which, at first glance, may be somewhat surprising to those unfamiliar with ancient traditions and the habitual modes of their symbolic expression. But we intend to develop these considerations and justify them

3. [*Emmanuel*='with us (is) God (El)'. Tr.]

4. [An ancient name for lower Britanny. Tr.]

5. See *Regnabit*, November 1924.

6. [Marie des Vallées, '*la sainte de Coutances*', was a seventeenth century French nun, contemplative and visionary. She was also confidante and inspirer of St John Eudes who was himself the apostle of public devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.]

more fully at some future date in studies where we may also be able to touch upon other points no less worthy of interest.[7]

Meanwhile we will mention, in connection with the Holy Grail, a strange complication which we have not taken into account so far: by one of the verbal assimilations which often play a far from negligible part in symbolism (assimilations which may have more profound reasons than might be imagined at first glance), the Grail is a vase (*grasale*) and a book (*gradale* or *graduale*). In some variants of the legend these two meanings are quite closely linked, for the book then becomes an inscription made by Christ or by an angel on the cup itself. For the moment we are not going to draw any conclusion from this, though there are connections easy to establish between the 'Book of Life' and certain elements of Apocalyptic symbolism.

In addition, the legend associates other objects with the Grail, and in particular a lance which, in the Christian adaptation, is none other than that of the centurion Longinus; but strange though it may seem, the lance, or one of its equivalents, already existed as a symbol complementary to the cup in ancient traditions. On the other hand, with the Greeks, the lance of Achilles was believed to heal wounds that it had caused; and the Medieval legend attributes precisely the same virtue to the lance of the Passion. And this brings to mind another similarity of the same kind: in the myth of Adonis (whose name, moreover, signifies 'the Lord'), when the hero is mortally gored by the tusk of a wild boar (here representing the lance),[8] his blood flowing out onto the earth, gives birth to a flower. Now M. Charbonneau-Lassay (in *Regnabit*, January 1925) has called attention to 'a mould [or press] for altar breads, of the twelfth century, on which is represented blood from the wounds of the Crucified falling in little drops which are transformed into roses, and in a stained glass window of the thirteenth century cathedral of Angers, the divine blood, flowing in rivulets, also spreads out taking the form of roses'.[9] We shall very shortly be speaking again of floral symbolism under a somewhat different aspect; but whatever the multiple meanings that nearly all symbols have to offer, it all fits together in perfect harmony, and this very multiplicity, far from being a disadvantage or defect, is on the contrary, for him who can understand it, one of the chief advantages of symbolism as a language that is much less narrowly limited than ordinary speech.

To bring these notes to a close, we will mention several symbols which, in different traditions, are sometimes substituted for that of the cup and which are ultimately identical with it. This is not a departure from our subject, for the Grail itself—as is clear from all we have just said—originally had no other signification than that which the sacred vase has wherever it is to be

7. See the following chapter, and also *The Lord of the World*.

8. [On the symbolism of The Wild Boar and its 'polar' significance which places it squarely in relation with the World Axis see below, 13, 'The Wild Boar and the Bear'.]

9. There is a close relationship between Creation [including the idea of 'development' symbolised by the roses in the window of Angers Cathedral] and Redemption as two aspects of the operation of the Divine Word.

found, as for example, in the East, the sacrificial cup containing the Vedic *Soma* (or the Mazdean *Haoma*), that extraordinary 'prefiguration' of the Eucharist to which we may perhaps return on some other occasion.[10] What is meant by *Soma* is the 'draught of immortality' (the *Amrita* of the Hindus, *Ambrosia* of the Greeks—two words etymologically similar) which confers or restores, for those who receive it with the requisite preparations, the 'sense of eternity' which has already been mentioned.

One of the symbols we wish to speak of is the triangle with the point directed downwards; it is a kind of schematic representation of the sacrificial cup and it is to be found in this sense in certain *yantras* or geometrical symbols of India. On the other hand, what is very remarkable from our point of view, is that the same figure is also a symbol of the heart, the shape of which it represents in a simplified form. The 'triangle of the heart' is a common expression in the eastern traditions. This leads to another question of interest: the representation of the heart inscribed in a down pointing triangle is in itself altogether legitimate, whether it be a question of the human or of the Divine Heart, and it has, in fact, a considerable significance when it is related to emblems used by certain Christian Hermetic groups in the Middle Ages, whose intentions were always fully orthodox. If, in modern times, some have sought to give a blasphemous meaning to such a figure, this is because, consciously or not, they have altered the primary sense of the symbols to the point of reversing their normal value. This is a phenomenon of which one can cite many examples, and which finds its explanation in the fact that certain symbols are actually susceptible of a double interpretation and have, as it were, two opposite faces. The serpent for example, and also the lion, can they not signify, as the case may be, both Christ and Satan? We cannot expound here a general theory on this subject, which would lead us too far afield; but it goes without saying that there is something in all this that makes the manipulation of symbols very delicate, and also that this point requires special attention when it is a question of discovering the real meaning of certain emblems and of interpreting them correctly.

Another symbol which is frequently the equivalent of the cup is a floral symbol: in fact, does not the flower, by its form, evoke the idea of a 'receptacle'? And does not one speak of the 'calix' of a flower? In the East, the symbolic flower *par excellence*, is the lotus. In the West, it is most often the rose that plays the same part. We do not say, of course, that this is the only signification of either the rose or the lotus; on the contrary, we have already indicated another one in this same chapter. But the cup symbolism is certainly to be seen in the design embroidered on an altar canon of the Abbey of Fontevrault, where the rose is placed at the foot of a lance along which flow drops of blood. This rose appears there in association with the lance exactly as the cup does elsewhere, and it seems indeed to be collecting the drops of blood rather than to be developing from a transformation of one

10. [See The Lord of the World, ch. 6.]

of them. But the two meanings are complements rather than opposites, for the drops, in falling on the rose, vivify it and make it bloom. They are the 'celestial dew', the image so often used in connection with the idea of the Redemption, or with the kindred ideas of regeneration and resurrection; but that, too, would require long explanations, even if we were to limit ourselves to pointing out the agreement of the different traditions with regard to this other symbol.[11]

On the other hand, since the Rose-Cross has been mentioned in connection with the seal of Luther,[12] we will say that this Hermetic emblem was at first specifically Christian, whatever false and more or less 'naturalistic' interpretations have been given it, from the eighteenth century onwards; and is it not remarkable that in this figure, the rose occupies the centre of the cross, the very place of the Sacred Heart? Apart from those representations where the five wounds of the Crucified are represented as so many roses, the central rose, when it stands alone, can very well be identified with the Heart itself, the vase which contains the blood, which is the centre of life and also the centre of the entire being.

There is still at least one more symbolic equivalent of the cup: this is the lunar crescent; but a full explanation of this would require developments which are quite outside the subject of the present study. We mention it, therefore, only so as not to neglect entirely any side of the question.

From all the relationships which we have noted we will even now draw one conclusion which we hope to be able to clarify later. When one finds such agreement everywhere, is this not more than a mere indication of the existence of a primordial tradition? And how can it be explained that in most cases, those who feel obliged to admit this primordial tradition in principle thereafter think no more about it, and in fact reason as if it had never existed, or at least as if nothing of it had been preserved over the centuries? If any one is prepared to reflect on how abnormal such an attitude is he will perhaps be less inclined to wonder at certain considerations which, in reality, only seem strange in virtue of the mental habits that characterise our time. Besides, a little unprejudiced research suffices to reveal on all sides the signs of this essential doctrinal unity, the consciousness of which has at times been obscured among men but which has never entirely disappeared. And as this search progresses, the points of comparison multiply as if of themselves, and new proofs appear at every moment. Certainly, the *querite et invenietis* (seek and ye shall find) of the Gospel is not a vain saying.

11. Cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 3. The similarity between the word dew [French *rosée*, Latin *ros*] and the word 'rose' [French *rose*, Latin *rosa*] cannot escape the notice of those who know how often a certain phonetic symbolism is used. [On floral, symbolism, see below, 11.]

12. [See *Regnabit*, December 1925.]

ADDENDUM [13]

We will add here a few words in answer to an objection that was made to our view of the relationship between the Holy Grail and the Sacred Heart, even though the reply already given at the time seems to us fully satisfactory.[14]

It is of little importance that Chrestien de Troyes and Robert de Boron did not see in the ancient legend (of which they were only the adapters) all the significance contained in it. This significance was really there, nevertheless, and we claim only to have made it explicit without introducing anything 'modern' whatsoever into our interpretation. It is quite difficult, moreover, to say exactly what the writers of the twelfth century saw or did not see in the legend; and given that they only played the part of mere 'transmitters', we readily agree that they did not see all that was seen by those who inspired them, that is, the real custodians of the traditional doctrine.

On the other hand, as regards the Celts, we were careful to recall the precautions that are necessary when one wishes to speak of them, given the absence of any written documents. But why should it be supposed, despite the contrary indications that are nevertheless available, that the Celts were less favoured than the other ancient peoples? We see everywhere, and not in Egypt alone, the symbolic assimilation established between the heart and the cup or vase. Everywhere the heart is looked on as the centre of the being, a centre that is both divine and human in the multiple applications to which this notion lends itself. Furthermore, the sacrificial cup everywhere represents

13. [Published in *Regnabit*, December 1925.]

14. [See *Regnabit*, October 1925, pp. 358 & 359. A correspondent had written to the journal: 'A very interesting study of M. Guénon on the Holy Grail and the Heart of Jesus. But cannot one level against his thesis an objection that would undermine it to the point of collapse? Chrestien de Troyes probably never thought of the Heart of Christ. In any case, the Celts of ancient Gaul certainly never thought of it. To see in the Holy Grail an emblem of the Heart of Christ is, therefore, a quite modern interpretation which may be ingenious, but which would have astonished our ancestors! *Regnabit* responded: 'Some day M. Guénon himself may be able to tell us what he thinks of the objection advanced against his thesis. We simply note that the complete 'nescience' of the Celts or of Chrestien de Troyes concerning the Heart of Jesus cannot 'undermine' the interpretation of the legend of the Holy Grail given us by M. Guénon. He does not assert that the Celts *have seen* in the mysterious Vase an emblem of the Heart of Christ. He shows that the Holy Grail—which the Celts knew, and the legend of which they passed on to us—is *objectively* an emblem of the living Heart which is the true cup and the true life. Now this second affirmation is independent of the first. That the Celts *did not see* such and such a meaning in the legend that nourished their thought does not prove that this meaning is absent. It simply proves that this meaning remains hidden, even to those who must have loved the admirable legend so much. Today, we all know that the phrase *full of grace* of the angelic salutation includes the grace of the immaculate Conception of Mary. Imagine that during long centuries an entire school of theology *had not seen* in the formula the meaning that we see today—this would not prove that the meaning *is not there*. It would prove simply that this school had not grasped the entire significance of the formula. It is *a fortiori* possible that one of the true meanings of a religious myth may not have been perceived even by those who piously conserved the legend'.]

the Centre of the Heart of the World, the 'abode of immortality'.[15] What more is necessary? We are well aware that the cup and the lance, or their equivalents, have had yet other significations in addition to those we mentioned, but without dwelling any further on this, we can say that all these significations, no matter how strange some of them may appear to modern eyes, are in perfect agreement among themselves and that in reality they express applications of the same principle to diverse orders, according to a law of correspondence on which is founded the harmonious multiplicity of meanings which are included in all symbolism.

We hope to show in other studies not only that the Centre of the World is in fact to be identified with the Heart of Christ, but also that this identity was plainly indicated in ancient doctrines. Obviously, the expression 'Heart of Christ' must in this case be taken in a sense which is not precisely that which one would call 'historical'. But it must be said yet again that historical facts themselves, like all the rest, are 'translations', into their own particular 'language', of higher realities, and conform to the law of correspondence we have just alluded to, a law which alone makes possible the explanation of certain 'prefigurations'. It is a question, if one will, of the Christ-principle, that is, of the Word manifested at the central point of the Universe. But who would dare to maintain that the eternal Word and His historical, earthly and human manifestation are not really one and the same Christ under different aspects? We touch here on the relationships between the temporal and the timeless, and perhaps it is not appropriate to insist further on this; for these are precisely those things which symbolism alone can express in the measure that they are expressible. In any case, it is enough to know how to read the symbols in order to find in them all that we ourselves have found; but alas, in our age especially, not everyone knows how to read them.

6 § The Holy Grail

ARTHUR EDWARD WAITE has published a work on the legends of the Holy Grail[1] that is imposing in its dimensions and by the amount of research

15. We could have recalled the Hermetic *athanor*, the vase where the 'Great Work' is effected, the name of which according to some was derived from the Greek *athanatos*, 'immortal' [If Guénon himself had been able to edit this early article for the present book he would no doubt have pointed out, as he did to me, that *athanor* is in fact a transcription of the Arabic *at-tannūr* (the furnace), but that its resemblance to the Greek word is none the less significant according to the Hindu principle of *nirukta*-Ed.]. The invisible fire which is perpetually maintained there corresponds to the vital heat which resides in the heart. Likewise, we could have shown the relationships with another very widely used symbol, that of the *egg*, which signifies resurrection and immortality and to which we may have occasion to return. On the other hand, we note that the cup in the Tarot cards (the origin of which is quite mysterious) has been replaced by the heart in ordinary playing cards, which is another indication of the equivalence of the two symbols.

1. *The Holy Grail, Its Legends and Symbolism*, by Arthur Edward Waite, London, 1933.

that it represents. All who are interested in the question will be able to find in it a very complete and methodical exposition of the multiple texts which relate to the Grail question, as well as the diverse theories which have been proposed to explain the origin and the significance of these legends that are so complex, and at times even contradictory in certain of their elements. It must be added that Waite did not intend to produce a work of erudition only, and he is to be commended for this. We are in entire agreement with him on the minimal value of all work that does not go beyond this point of view, and of which the interest can only be 'documentary'. Waite intended to clarify the real and 'inner' significance of the symbolism of the Holy Grail and of the 'quest'. Unfortunately, we feel bound to say that this aspect of his work is the one which seems least satisfactory. The conclusions he reaches are even rather disappointing, especially if one thinks of all the work done in order to reach them, and it is on this point that we would like to formulate several observations which will, quite naturally, relate to questions we have treated on other occasions.

We do not think we would be doing Waite any injustice if we say that his work is somewhat *one-sighted*[2] or, as might be said in French, 'partial'. It might not be rigorously exact, and in any case we do not mean by this that the author intended to be partial. It has more to do with a failing frequently to be found with specialists in certain kinds of studies: they tend to reduce everything to a certain perspective or to neglect what cannot be so reduced. That the Grail legend is Christian is incontestable, and Waite is right in affirming it. But does this prevent it from being something else at the same time? Those who are aware of the fundamental unity of all traditions will not see any incompatibility whatsoever in this possibility. But Waite, for his part, is somehow bent on seeing only that which is specifically Christian, thus enclosing himself within a particular tradition, whose relations with other traditions, precisely through its 'inward' dimension, seem to escape him. Not that he denies the existence of elements from another source, probably prior to Christianity, for this would go against the evidence; but he allows them only a very mediocre importance and seems to consider them as accidentals, as having been added to the legends from outside, simply in virtue of their presence in the setting in which the legend was elaborated. He thus looks on these elements as deriving from what is commonly known as 'folklore', so called not always with disdain as the word itself might suggest, but rather to satisfy a certain 'fashion' of our time and without always taking into account the intentions that are implied therein. Perhaps it is worth while to dwell on this point a little.

The very conception of 'folklore', as commonly understood, rests on a radically false idea, namely that there are 'popular creations', spontaneous

2. [The French text has *one-sighted*, printing these English words literally. This may well have been an aural misapprehension of 'one-sided' which, of course, is a common English idiom; nevertheless, *one-sighted* is not altogether inept in the present context. Tr.]

productions of the mass of the people; and one sees immediately the relationship between this perception and 'democratic' prejudices. As has been rightly said, 'the profound interest of all so-called popular traditions is the fact that they are not popular in origin';[3] and we will add that if it is a question of genuinely traditional elements, as is almost always the case, however deformed, diminished or fragmentary they may sometimes be, as well as things having a genuine symbolic value—all that, far from being of popular origin, is not even of human origin. What may be popular is solely the fact of survival, when these elements belong to traditional forms that are now defunct; and in this respect the term *folklore* takes on a meaning very near that of 'paganism', if we consider only the etymology of the word 'pagan', and not its 'polemical' use as a term of reproach. It is thus that the people conserve, without understanding them, the debris of ancient traditions that sometimes go back to a past too remote to be dated, so that it has to be relegated to the obscure domain of 'prehistory'; they thereby fulfil the function of a sort of more or less 'subconscious' collective memory, the content of which has manifestly come from elsewhere.[4] What may seem most surprising is that on closest scrutiny the things so preserved are found to contain, under a more or less veiled form, an abundance of esoteric information, which is, in its essence, precisely what is least popular; and this fact suggests of itself an explanation which may be summed up as follows. When a traditional form is on the point of becoming extinct, its last representatives may deliberately entrust to this aforesaid collective memory what would otherwise be lost beyond recall; that is, in fact, the only means of saving what can, in some measure, be saved. At the same time, the natural incomprehension of the masses is a sufficient guarantee that what has an esoteric character will not be laid bare and profaned, but will remain only as a sort of witness of the past for those who, in later times, will be capable of understanding it.

Having said this, let us add that we do not see why everything that pertains to traditions other than Christianity should be attributed to *folklore*, without any more thorough examination, Christianity alone being exempt from this attribution. Such seems to be the intention of Waite when he accepts the *folklore* denomination for pre-Christian and especially Celtic elements which are to be found in legends of the Grail. In this respect, there are no privileged traditions; the only distinction to be made is between traditions which have disappeared and those which are still living, so that it all comes down to knowing whether the Celtic tradition was really no longer living when the legends in question were constituted. At the very least, this is debatable. On the one hand, this tradition may have lasted longer than is commonly believed, with a more or less hidden organization, whereas, on the other

3. *La Cuisine des Anges, une aesthetique de la pensée*, Luc Benoist, p. 74.

4. This is an essentially 'lunar' function, and it is to be noted that, astrologically, the popular masses in fact correspond to the moon. At the same time, this clearly indicates their passive character, incapable of initiative or spontaneity.

hand, the legends themselves may be older than the 'critics' think, not necessarily because there may have been texts that are lost today, which we are scarcely more inclined to believe than Waite is, but because at first these legends may have been transmitted orally for several centuries, which is far from being an exceptional fact. For our part, we see there the mark of a 'junction' between two traditional forms, one ancient and the other new, the Celtic and the Christian traditions, a junction by which that which was to be saved from the first was somehow incorporated into the second. Doubtless, this would have been modified up to a certain point as to its outward form, by adaptation and assimilation, but not by being transposed onto another plane, as Waite would have it, for there are equivalences between all regular traditions. What faces us here therefore, is something quite other than a mere question of 'sources', in the sense that modern scholars understand this. It might well be difficult to give an exact place and date for this junction, but that has only a secondary and mainly historical interest. Moreover, it is easy to see that these things are among those that do not leave traces in written 'documents'. Perhaps the 'Celtic Church' or the 'Culdeen Church' deserves more attention in this respect than Waite seems disposed to accord it; even its denomination suggests this; and it is not unlikely that there may have been something behind it of a different order, not religious but initiatic, for like all that relates to the links between different traditions, the junction we are speaking of here necessarily belongs to the initiatic or esoteric domain. Exoterism, whether religious or not, never goes beyond the limits of the traditional form to which it strictly pertains. That which surpasses these limits cannot pertain to a 'Church' as such; the Church can only serve as its outward 'support'.

Another observation is likewise called for, this time on symbolism: there are symbols which are common to the most diverse and most widely separated traditional forms, not as a result of 'borrowings', which in many cases would be quite impossible, but because in reality they pertain to the Primordial Tradition from which these forms have issued either directly or indirectly. This is precisely the case with the vase or the cup. Why should it only be *folklore* in prechristian traditions, while in Christianity alone it is an essentially 'eucharistic' symbol?

It is not the assimilations of Bournouf[5] or others which are to be rejected here, but rather the naturalistic interpretations which they have sought to impose on Christianity as on everything else and which, in reality, are nowhere valid. What needs doing is thus the exact opposite of what has been done by Waite who, stopping short at outward and superficial explanations which he trustingly accepts when they do not apply to Christianity, perceives radically different and unrelated meanings where there are only more or less multiple aspects of one and the same symbol or its various applications.

5. [The reference is presumably to Eugène Bournouf, French linguist who deciphered the ancient Avestan tongue using manuscripts brought back to France by Anquetil-Duperron. Tr.]

Doubtless it would have been otherwise if he had not been led astray by his preconceived notion that there is a sort of difference in kind between Christianity and other traditions. In the same way, although he very rightly rejects any application to the Grail mysteries of those theories which are bound up with so called 'gods of vegetation', it is regrettable that he is much less clear with regard to the mysteries of antiquity which have never had anything in common with this quite recently invented naturalism. The 'gods of vegetation' and other fictions of this kind have never existed except in the imagination of Fraser[6] and those like him, whose anti-traditional intentions cannot be doubted.

In point of fact, it seems that Waite has been more or less influenced by a certain 'evolutionism', a tendency that comes out into the open when he declares that what is important is much less the origin of the legend than its final state; and he appears to believe that there must have been, from the one to the other, a sort of progressive improvement. The truth is that wherever something genuinely traditional is concerned, everything must already be there from the very beginning; the later developments only serve to make it more explicit, without adding new elements from some other source.

Waite seems to admit a sort of 'spiritualisation' by which a higher meaning might be grafted onto something that did not have it at the outset, whereas in fact, it is rather the inverse of this that generally takes place; he comes all too close here to the profane outlook of the 'historians of religions'. We find, in connection with alchemy, a striking example of this kind of reversal: he thinks that material alchemy preceded spiritual alchemy and that the latter appeared only with Kuhnrath and Jacob Boehme. If he knew certain Arabic treatises which are definitely earlier than these, he would be obliged to modify his opinion simply in the light of written documents. Moreover, as he recognizes that the language used is the same in the two cases, we might ask how he can be sure that in any given text it is merely a question of material operations. The truth is that it was not always felt desirable to declare expressly that something else was involved, something which, on the contrary, it was precisely the function of the symbolism to veil; and if subsequently there were those who did declare it, this was above all in view of degeneration traceable to the fact that there were then men who, ignorant of the value of symbols, understood everything literally and in an exclusively material sense. These were the 'blowers', the precursors of modern chemistry. To think that a new meaning can be given to a symbol, a meaning that is not inherent in it, is almost a negation of symbolism, for it amounts to making it something artificial and entirely arbitrary, and in any case something purely human. In this connection, Waite goes so far as to say that everyone finds in a symbol what he puts there himself, so that its meaning would change with the mentality of each epoch. We recognize here the psychological theories

6. [Sir James G. Fraser, author of *The Golden Bough*. Tr.]

that are so dear to many of our contemporaries. Were we not then right to speak of evolutionism?

We have often said, and we cannot repeat it too often: every real symbol bears its multiple meanings within itself, and this is so from its very origin; for it is not constituted as such in virtue of human convention but in virtue of the law of correspondence which links all the worlds together. If some see these meanings while others do not, or see them only partially, they are none the less really there: it is the 'intellectual horizon' of each person that makes all the difference. Symbolism is an exact science and not a daydream in which individual fantasies can have a free run.

In things of this order, therefore, we do not believe in the 'inventions of the poets' to which Waite seems disposed to attach great importance. Far from bearing on the essential, these inventions serve only to hide it, intentionally or otherwise, by clothing it in misleading 'fictive' appearances; and sometimes they hide it only too well, for when they encroach too much it becomes almost impossible to probe to the depth of the original meaning. Was it not thus that symbolism, with the Greeks, degenerated into mythology? This danger is to be feared especially when the poet himself is unaware of the real value of the symbols, for obviously such a case can occur. The fable of the 'donkey carrying relics' applies here as well as in many other situations. The poet, then, will play a part analogous to that of the common people when they unwittingly conserve or transmit initiatic teaching, as we mentioned above. The particular question that arises here is: are the authors of the Grail romances to be placed in this category or, on the contrary, were they conscious in one degree or another of the profound significance of what they were expressing? It is not easy to answer this question with any certainty, for here too appearances can be misleading. Where there is a mixture of insignificant and incoherent elements, one is tempted to think that the author did not know what he was speaking about. Nevertheless, it is not necessarily so, for it often happens that obscurities and even contradictions may be perfectly intentional and that seemingly pointless details may have the express purpose of leading astray the attention of the profane, just as a symbol can be hidden in a more or less complicated motif of ornamentation. In the Middle Ages, especially, examples of this kind abound, even if it be only with Dante and the *Fedeli d'Amore*. The fact that the higher meaning shines through less with Chrestien de Troyes, for example, than with Robert de Borron does not necessarily prove that the first was less well aware of it than the second. Still less should it be concluded that this meaning is absent from his writings, which would be an error comparable to that of attributing to the ancient alchemists preoccupations only of a material order, for the sole reason that they did not deem it appropriate to spell out literally that their science was in reality of a spiritual nature.[7] Moreover,

7. If Waite believes, as he seems to, that certain things are too 'material' to be compatible with the existence, in the same texts, of a higher meaning, we could ask what he thinks of Rabelais and of Boccacio.

the question of the 'initiation' of the authors of romances perhaps has less importance than one might at first think, for in any case this makes no difference to the outward form under which the subject is presented. Once there is any question of exteriorising, but in no sense 'vulgarising', esoteric data, it is easy to understand that the form would have to be as it is. We will go even further: for the purposes of such an exteriorisation even a profane person may serve as spokesman for an initiatic organisation which, in such a case, will have chosen him for this purpose for his qualities as writer or poet, or for some other thoroughly contingent reason. Dante wrote with perfect knowledge. Chrestien de Troyes, Robert de Borron and many others probably understood much less of what they expressed; and some among them probably understood nothing at all. But ultimately it is a matter of little importance, for if there was an initiatic organisation behind them, whatever it may have been, the danger of a deformation due to their incomprehension was thereby averted, such an organisation being able to guide them without them even suspecting it, either through the intermediary of one of its members supplying them with elements to be used in the work or by other suggestions and influences, more subtle and less tangible, but none the less real and effective.

There would seem to be no doubt that the origins of the Grail legend are to be attributed to the transmission of traditional initiatic elements from Druidism to Christianity. Once this transmission had been duly made with all regularity, however it may have taken place, these elements thereby became an integral part of Christian esoterism.

7 § Tradition and the Unconscious

We have previously explained the part that psychoanalysis plays in the work of subversion which, following the materialist 'solidification' of the world, constitutes the second phase of antitraditional action characteristic of the entire modern period.[1] This subject now needs to be broached again, because for some time it has been clear that the psychoanalytic offensive is gaining more and more ground: it now goes so far as to attack tradition directly under the pretext of explaining it, the present trend being to deform most dangerously the very notion of tradition itself. In this respect, a distinction should be made between the unequally 'advanced' varieties of psychoanalysis. As first conceived by Freud, psychoanalysis was limited, up to a certain point, by the materialist attitude which he was always bent on maintaining. Not that it was any the less satanic, but at least Freudian materialism frustrated any pretensions of going beyond certain domains, or even if it sought to do so, it actually achieved no more than distortions so gross that the confusions

1. See *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 34.

resulting from them were relatively easy to dissipate. Thus when Freud spoke of 'symbolism', what he thus misnamed was in reality no more than a mere product of the human imagination, varying from one individual to another and having nothing in common with authentic traditional symbolism. But that was only a first step; and it remained for other psychoanalysts to modify their master's theories in the direction of a false spirituality, in order that by a much more subtle confusion they might apply them to the interpretation of traditional symbolism itself. This was especially the case with Carl Gustav Jung, whose first attempts in this field are already rather old.[2] It must be noted, for it is very significant, that for this interpretation Jung starts from a comparison he believes can be established between certain symbols and drawings done by the mentally ill; and in fact, these drawings sometimes do offer a sort of 'parodic' resemblance to genuine symbols, which is enough to raise our suspicions that their source of 'inspiration' is a very sinister one.

What greatly aggravates matters is that Jung, in order to explain what purely individual factors cannot account for, is led to postulate the hypothesis of a so-called 'collective unconscious', existing in some way in or below the psychic substance of all human individuals, an 'unconscious' to which, so he believed, can be related indiscriminately the origin of symbols themselves and their pathological caricatures. Obviously, this term 'unconscious' is quite inept and what it serves to designate, in so far as it can be said to have any reality, is what psychologists more commonly call the subconscious, that is, the whole range of the lower reaches of consciousness. We have already remarked elsewhere on the confusion that constantly occurs between the 'subconscious' and the 'supraconscious': since the supraconscious escapes completely by its very nature from the domain in which psychologists deploy their investigations, they never fail, when they happen to come across some of its manifestations, to attribute them to the subconscious. It is precisely this confusion that we meet again here: there cannot be the slightest doubt that the productions of the sick, observed by psychiatrists, stem from the subconscious; but all that is of the traditional order, on the contrary, and in particular symbolism, can only be related to the supraconscious, to that by which a communication is established with the suprahuman, whereas the subconscious tends on the contrary towards the infra-human. We have here in fact a veritable inversion that is thoroughly characteristic of the kind of explanation in question; and what gives it an appearance of justification is that in cases such as we have mentioned it happens that the subconscious, thanks to its contacts with psychic influences of the lowest order, succeeds in 'aping' the supraconscious.[3] Here lies the very source of the illusion that ends up in what we have called a 'spirituality in reverse', for those who let themselves be deceived by these counterfeits and who are incapable of discerning their true nature.

2. See on this subject André Préau, *Le Fleur d'or et le Taoisme sans Tao.*
3. ['Satan is the ape of God', theologians used to say. Tr.]

By the theory of the 'collective unconscious' it is thought possible to explain the fact that the symbol is 'prior to human thought' and that it goes beyond it. The real question, which seems not even to be asked, would be to know in which direction individual thought is 'gone beyond', whether it is downwards, as this appeal to the so-called 'unconscious' would seem to indicate, or upwards as, on the contrary, all traditional doctrines expressly affirm. We have noted in a recent article a phrase where this confusion appears as clearly as possible: 'The interpretation of symbols . . . is the open door into the Great All, that is to say the way that leads to the total light through the labyrinth of the dark underworld of our individuality'. Unfortunately, the odds are that, in going astray in this 'dark underworld', one will reach something quite other than the 'total light'. We notice also the dangerous ambiguity of the 'Great All' which, like the 'cosmic consciousness' into which some aspire to lose themselves, cannot be anything other than the diffuse psychism of the lowest regions of the subtle world. It is thus that the psychoanalytic interpretation of symbols and their traditional interpretation lead in reality to diametrically opposed ends.

Another important remark is called for: among the very diverse things that the 'collective unconscious' is supposed to explain, folklore must naturally be included; and this is one of the cases where the theory might have some semblance of truth. To be more exact, in this context one should speak of a kind of 'collective memory', which is like an image or reflection in the human domain of that 'cosmic memory' which corresponds to one aspect of the symbolism of the moon. But to seek to infer the very origin of tradition from the nature of folklore is to make a mistake just like the now so widespread one of considering as 'primitive' what is only the product of a degeneration. In fact it is obvious that folklore, which is essentially made up of elements of extinct traditions, inevitably represents a degeneration with respect to these traditions, while being none the less the only means by which something of them could be saved. It must also be asked in what conditions the conservation of these elements has been confided to the 'collective memory'. As we have already had occasion to remark,[4] we can only see in this the result of a perfectly conscious action on the part of the last representatives of ancient traditional forms which were on the point of disappearance. What is altogether certain is that the collective mentality, in so far as it corresponds to any reality, is reduced to nothing more than a memory, which is expressed in astrological symbolism by saying that it is of a lunar nature. In other words, it may fulfil a certain function of conservation, which is precisely that of folklore; but it is totally incapable of producing or elaborating anything whatsoever, least of all something of a transcendent order as all traditional teaching is by definition.

The psychoanalytical interpretation of traditional symbols aims in reality

4. [See ch. 6 above, 'The Holy Grail'.]

at denying this transcendence of tradition but, as one might say, in a new way, different from those that have been used before. It is no longer a question, as with rationalism in all its forms, either of a brutal negation or of pure and simple ignorance of the existence of any non-human elements. It seems to be admitted, on the contrary, that tradition actually has a non-human character, but the term non-human is given an altogether new slant. Thus, at the end of the article we cited above, we read: 'We will perhaps return to these psychoanalytical interpretations of our spiritual treasure, the constancy of which through diverse times and civilisations well demonstrates the traditional, non-human character—non-human, if one takes the word 'human' in a separative and 'individual' sense'. It is perhaps this avowal that best shows what is the fundamental intention in all this, an intention moreover which we are ready to believe is not always conscious with those who write things of this kind. For it must be clearly understood that what is involved is not this or that individuality, even that of a head of a school such as Jung, but rather the most suspect 'inspiration' from which these interpretations proceed. It is not necessary to go very far in the study of traditional doctrines to know that, when a 'non-human' element is in question, what is understood thereby, pertaining as it essentially does to supra-individual states of being, has absolutely nothing in common with a 'collective' factor, which in itself can only relate to the domain of the human individual, and which, moreover, by its 'subconscious' character, can in any case open communication only with the states of the infra-human. It is here that the process of subversion is immediately to be grasped, a process which consists in taking certain traditional notions and turning them back to front, as it were, by substituting the subconscious for the supraconscious, the infra-human for the supra-human. Is not this subversion much more dangerous than a mere negation, and will it be thought that we exaggerate[5] in saying that it helps prepare the way for a veritable 'counter-tradition' destined to serve as vehicle for this 'spirituality in reverse', the apparent and fleeting triumph of which, towards the end of the present cycle, is to be marked by the 'reign of the Antichrist'?

5. [The situation Guénon describes here has developed markedly in the forty-odd years since this study was originally published. We mention only a few indicators which are symptomatic but far from isolated: increasing publishing activity, both of books and journals, devoted to Jungian thought; increasing funding available for activities aimed at spreading Jungian concepts; the widespread acceptance of 'Jungian philosophy', and the intrusion of Jungian thought into religion itself, notably into what remains of Roman Catholicism. Two incidents may be mentioned to illustrate this latter trend: the abbot of the monastery of an ancient religious order announces that he is studying to become a Jungian analyst, as if openly avowing the indigence of contemporary Benedictine spirituality! And another Roman Catholic priest writes a book of 'theology' in which he praises and promotes Jung, even while deprecating St Thomas Aquinas! No, Guénon did not exaggerate. Tr.]

8 § The Science of Letters (*'Ilm al-ḥurūf*)

IN the preliminaries to a study on *La Théodicée de la Kabbale*,[1] Francis Warrain, after having said that 'the hypothesis of the Kabbalah is that the Hebrew language is the perfect language taught by God to the first man', feels obliged to express reservations as to the 'illusory pretension of possessing the pure elements of natural language, while in fact only fragments and deformations have come down to us'. He none the less admits that 'it remains probable that the ancient languages flowed from a hieratic language composed by inspired men', and that 'these languages must therefore have words expressing the essence of things and their numerical relationships'; and further, that 'one can say as much for the divinatory arts'. It will no doubt be as well to throw some light on this question; but to begin with we wish to make it clear that Warrain adopts an essentially philosophical point of view, while for our part we intend to keep strictly to initiatic and traditional ground.

A first point that is important to note is this: the affirmation according to which the Hebrew tongue was the very language of the first revelation seems not even to have come from Kabbalistic doctrine, but to be purely exoteric in itself, while serving in reality as a veil over something else much more profound. The proof thereof is that the same is also claimed for other languages, and that this affirmation of 'primordiality', taken literally, cannot be justified in each case as the claims obviously would be contradictory. The same assertion is made for Arabic, and the opinion according to which Arabic had been the original language of humanity is commonly held in countries where this language is used; but what is remarkable and what has made us think that the same applies to Hebrew, is that this popular opinion is so ill-founded and so lacking in authority that it formally contradicts the genuine traditional teaching of Islam according to which the 'language of Adam' was Syrian, *lughah suryāniyyah*, which moreover has nothing in common with the country now designated by the name Syria, nor with any of the more or less ancient languages of which men retain any present memory. Strictly speaking, this *lughah suryāniyyah*, according to the interpretation given to the name, is the language of 'solar illumination', *shams ishrāqiyyah*. In fact, *Sūryā* is the Sanskrit name for the Sun and this would seem to indicate that its root, *sur*, one of those which designate light, itself pertains to that original language. It is a question, therefore, of that primeval Syria of which Homer speaks as an island 'beyond Ortygia' (which identifies it with the Hyperborean *Tula*), an island 'where are

1. [Editions Vega, Paris, 1931; second edition, 1949.]

the revolutions of the sun'.[2] According to Josephus, the capital of this country was called Heliopolis, 'city of the Sun',[3] the name subsequently given to the city in Egypt that was also called *On*. The successive transfers of these names (and many more as well) would be a particularly interesting study insofar as they concern the establishment of secondary spiritual centres of diverse periods, an establishment closely related to that of the languages destined to serve as 'vehicles' for the corresponding traditional forms. These tongues are those which can rightly be called 'sacred languages'; and it is precisely on the distinction that must be made between these sacred languages and the vulgar or profane tongues that the justification of the Kabbalistic methods essentially rests, as well as similar procedures that are to be found in other traditions.

We can say this: just as every secondary spiritual centre is like an image of the primordial and Supreme Centre, as we have explained in our study *The Lord of the World*, every sacred or 'hieratic' language can be regarded as an image or reflection of the original language, which is the sacred language *par excellence*. This original sacred language is the 'lost word', or rather the 'hidden word' for men of the dark age, just as the Supreme Centre has become invisible and inaccessible for them. But there is no question of 'fragments and deformations' in all this; on the contrary, it concerns regular adaptations necessitated by circumstances of time and place, that is, by the fact that—according to the teaching of Muḥyi d-Dīn ibn al-ʿArabī in the beginning of the second part of his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* (Meccan Revelations)—each prophet or revealer has to use a language susceptible of being understood by those whom he addresses, a language that is thus more especially appropriate to the mentality of such a people and of such a time. This is also the reason for the very diversity of traditional forms, and it is this diversity which entails, as an immediate consequence, the diversity of languages which must serve the different traditions as respective means of expression. All the sacred languages, therefore, must be considered as the work of truly inspired men, apart from which they would not be apt for the function for which they are essentially destined. As regards the primordial language, its origin must be 'non-human', like that of the Primordial Tradition itself; and every sacred language still participates in this transcendence in that it is, in its structure (*al-mabānī*) and in its signification (*al-maʿānī*) a reflection of the primordial language. Moreover, the reflection can take different forms, which do not

2. [*Odyssey*, 15, 403–4. For Ortygia the French edition has Ogygia (the Isle of Calypso) which is clearly a mistake. Guénon's rendering suggests that he thought Homer meant an island from which the midnight sun could be seen, if we take 'revolutions' as an ellipsis for 'complete revolutions above the horizon'. However that may be, the usual translations 'where are the solstices' or 'where the sun turns (or changes) its course' also indicate a Hyperborean island, that is, an island at the same latitude as the most northerly point reached by the sun at midsummer. The plural 'solstices' is for the year-after-year recurrence of the summer solstice, for there can be no question here of the winter solstice. Ed.]

3. Cf., *The Solar Citadel* of the Rosicrucians, *The City of the Sun* of Campanella, etc. In reality, it is to this first Heliopolis that the cyclical symbolism of the Phoenix must be linked.

have the same importance in every case, for the question of adaptation also intervenes. Such, for example, is the symbolic form of the signs used in writing.[4] Such as is the correspondence of numbers with letters and consequently with words in virtue of the letters they are composed of, as is the case with Hebrew and Arabic particularly.

Certainly, it is difficult for Westerners to grasp what sacred languages really are, for in present conditions at least they have no direct contact with any of them; and in this connection, we recall what we have said more generally on other occasions about the difficulty of assimilating the 'traditional sciences', difficulties much greater than those that concern purely metaphysical teachings. The reason for this is the specialised nature of these sciences which attaches them inextricably to a particular traditional form and which prevents their being transposed, just as they are, from one civilisation to another, on pain of becoming unintelligible or of having only quite an illusory effect if not a completely false one. Thus, in order to master the full range of the symbolism of letters and numbers, it is necessary in some measure to live them in their application, even down to the circumstances of everyday life, as is possible in certain Oriental countries. But it would be absolutely chimerical to claim to introduce considerations and applications of this kind into European languages, for which they are not made and in which the numerical value of letters, for example, does not exist. The attempts that some have made in this order of ideas, apart from any traditional data, are therefore erroneous from the outset; and if nevertheless, accurate results sometimes have been obtained, for example from the onomantic point of view, this does not prove the value or the legitimacy of the method, but only the existence of a sort of 'intuitive' faculty (which, of course, has nothing in common with genuine intellectual intuition) on the part of those who have put these practices into use, as frequently happens in the 'divinatory arts'.[5]

In order to explain the metaphysical principles of the 'science of letters', Muḥyi d-Din ibn al-ʿArabī, in his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, envisaged the universe as symbolized by a book; this is the well known symbol of the *Liber Mundi* of the Rosicrucians and also the *Liber Vitae* of the Apocalypse.[6] The

4. Additionally, this form may have undergone modifications corresponding to later traditional re-adaptations, such as took place for Hebrew after the Babylonian captivity. We say that it is a question of a re-adaptation, for it is improbable that the ancient script was really lost in the short period of sixty-six years; and it is even astonishing that this has gone unnoticed. Similarly, facts of the same kind must have been produced in the case of other scripts in more or less distant times, notably for the Sanskrit alphabet and, in some measure, for Chinese ideograms.

5. It seems that one can say as much, in spite of the 'scientific' appearance of the methods, for the results obtained by modern astrology, which is so remote from true traditional astrology, the keys to which seem to be indeed lost. That science was something quite different from a mere divinatory art, even though it was evidently susceptible of applications of this kind, but in an altogether secondary and 'accidental' way.

6. We have previously pointed out the relationship that exists between this symbolism of the 'Book of Life' and the 'Tree of Life'; the leaves of the tree and the letters of the book represent all the creatures of the universe (the 'ten thousand beings' of the Far Eastern tradition).

letters of the book are, in principle, all written simultaneously and indivisibly by the 'divine pen' (*al-qalam al-ilāhi*). These 'transcendent letters' are the eternal essences or the divine ideas; and since every letter is at the same time a number, the agreement of this teaching with Pythagorean doctrine is evident. These same 'transcendent letters', which are all the creatures, after having been principially condensed in the divine omniscience have, by the divine breath, been transferred down to the lower planes and have formed and composed the manifested Universe. A comparison becomes necessary here with the part the letters also play in the cosmo-gonic doctrine of the *Sepher Ietsirah*; the 'science of letters', moreover, has an almost equal importance both in the Hebrew Kabbala and in Islamic esoterism.[7]

Starting from this principle, it will be easily understood that a correspondence may be established between the letters and the different parts of the manifested Universe, and more especially with our world. The existence of planetary and zodiacal correspondences is, in this respect, too well known for there to be any need to insist upon it, and it is enough to note that this places the 'science of letters' in close relationship with astrology considered as a cosmological science.[8] On the other hand, in virtue of the constitutive analogy of the 'microcosm' (*al-kawn aṣ-ṣaghīr*) with the 'macrocosm' (*al-kawn al-kabīr*), these same letters correspond also to the different parts of the human organism; and in this connection we will mention in passing that there is a therapeutic application of the 'science of letters', each letter being used in a certain way to heal the ailments that affect particularly the corresponding organ.

It follows from what we have said that the 'science of letters' must be considered at different levels, which can be identified with the 'three worlds'. In its highest sense, it is the knowledge of all things in the Principle itself, as eternal essences beyond all manifestation; in what may be called an intermediate sense, it is cosmogony, the knowledge of the production or formation of the manifested world; and finally, in its lowest sense, it is the knowledge of the virtues of names and numbers insofar as these express the nature of each being, a knowledge that by way of application makes it possible to exercise by these means and by reason of this correspondence a magical action on the beings themselves and on the events that concern them. In fact, according to the explanation of Ibn Khaldūn, written formulas that are composed of the same elements that constitute the totality of a being have thereby the faculty of acting upon that being; and this is also why the knowledge of

7. It must also be mentioned that the 'Book of the World' is at the same time the 'divine Message' (*ar-risālatu l-ilāhiyyah*), archetype of all sacred Books, the traditional scriptures being only 'translations' of it into human language. This is expressly affirmed of the *Vēda* and of the *Qur'ān*. The idea of the 'Eternal Gospel' also shows that this same conception is not entirely foreign to Christianity, or at least has not always been.

8. There are also other correspondences—with the elements, the sensible qualities, the celestial spheres, etc; the letters of the Arabic alphabet, being twenty-eight in number, are similarly related to the lunar mansions.

the name of a being, the expression of its own particular nature, can give one power over it. It is this application of the 'science of letters' which is habitually designated by the name *sīmīā*.[9] It should be noted that this goes much further than a mere 'divinatory' procedure: first of all, one can by means of a calculation (*ḥisāb*) involving the numbers that correspond to the letters and names, forecast certain events;[10] but this is only a first step, as it were, the most elementary of all; and it is possible on the basis of this calculation to effect mutations which will have the effect of a corresponding modification in the events themselves.

Here, too, a distinction has to be made between widely differing degrees, as in the knowledge itself of which this is only an application. When this action is limited to the sensible world, that is only the lowest degree and it is in this case that one can rightly speak of magic; but it can easily be appreciated that something of a quite different order takes place when there is any question of an action that has a repercussion in the higher worlds. In such a case, one is obviously in the 'initiatic' domain in the fullest sense of that epithet; and only he can actively operate in all the worlds who has reached the degree of 'red sulphur' (*al-kibrīt al-aḥmar*), a designation which indicates, no doubt surprisingly for some, an assimilation of the 'science of letters' with alchemy.[11] In fact, these two sciences, understood in depth, are in reality one and the same; and that which both of them express under very different appearances is nothing other than the very process of initiation itself which, moreover, rigorously reproduces the cosmogonic process, inasmuch as the total realisation of the possibilities of a being is necessarily brought about by passing through the same phases as that of universal Existence.[12]

9. This world *sīmīā* does not seem to be purely Arabic; it probably comes from the Greek *sēmeia*, 'signs', which makes it almost the equivalent of the Kabbalistic *gematria*, a word also of Greek origin and derived not from *geometria* as is most often claimed, but from *grammateia* (from *grammata*, 'letters').

10. In certain cases it is possible to obtain by similar calculations the solutions to questions of a doctrinal order, and this solution is sometimes presented under a most remarkable symbolic form.

11. Muhyi d-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī is called *Ash-Shaikh al-Akbar wa-l-Kibrīt al-Aḥmar*.

12. It is at least curious to note that Masonic symbolism itself, in which the 'lost word' and the search for it play an important part, characterizes the initiatic degrees by expressions manifestly borrowed from the 'science of letters': to spell, to read, to write. The 'Master', who has among his attributes the 'drawing board', if he was truly what he should be, would be able not only to read but also to write in the 'Book of Life', that is, to co-operate consciously in the realisation of the plan of the 'Great Architect of the Universe'. One can thereby judge the distance which separates the nominal possession of this grade with its actual possession!

9 § The Language of the Birds

Wa-ṣ-ṣāffāti ṣaffan,
Faz-zājirāti zajran,
Fat-tāliyāti dhikran . . .

By those ranged in ranks,
And who drive away, repulsing,
And who recite the invocation . . .

Qur'ān, XXXVII, 1–3

THERE is often mention, in diverse traditions, of a mysterious language called 'the language of the birds'—a designation that is clearly symbolic, for the very importance that is attributed to the knowledge of this language, as the prerogative of a high initiation, does not allow us to take it literally. We read, for example, in the *Qur'ān*: 'And Solomon was David's heir. And he said, O mankind! Lo! we have been taught the language of the birds (*ullimnā manṭiq aṭ-ṭayr*) and have been given abundance of all things . . .'. (XXVII, 16). Elsewhere we read of heroes who, having vanquished the dragon, like Siegfried in the Nordic legend, instantly understand the language of the birds; and this makes it easy to interpret the symbolism in question. Victory over the dragon has, as its immediate consequence, the conquest of immortality, which is represented by some object the approach to which is guarded by the dragon; and this conquest essentially implies the reintegration into the centre of the human state, that is, into the point where communication is established with the higher states of the being. It is this communication which is represented by the understanding of the language of the birds; and in fact birds are frequently taken as symbols of the angels, that is, precisely, of the higher states. We have had occasion elsewhere[1] to cite the Gospel parable that refers, in this very sense, to 'the birds of the heavens' which come and rest in the branches of the tree, the same tree that represents the axis which passes through the centre of each state of the being and links all the states with each other.[2]

In the Qur'anic text given above, the term *aṣ-ṣāffāt* is taken as meaning literally the birds, but as denoting symbolically the angels (*al-malā'ikah*); and thus the first verse signifies the constitution of the celestial or spiritual

1. *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 3.

2. In the Medieval symbol of the *Peridexion* (a corruption of the word *Paradision*), one sees the birds on the branches of the tree and the dragon at its foot (cf., *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 9). In a study on the symbolism of the 'bird of Paradise' (*Le Rayonnement intellectuel*, May–June 1930) Charbonneau-Lassay has reproduced a sculpture in which this bird is represented by only a head and wings, a form frequently used to depict the angels [cf., *Le Bestiaire du Christ*, ch. 46, p. 425].

hierarchies.[3] The second verse expresses the fight of the angels against the demons, the celestial powers against the infernal powers, that is, the opposition between higher and lower states.[4] In the Hindu tradition this is the struggle of the *Dēvas* against the *Asuras* and also, according to a symbolism which comes very close to the symbolism of our theme, the combat of *Garuda* against the *Nāga* which is, moreover, none other than the above mentioned serpent or dragon. The *Garuda* is the eagle, and elsewhere it is replaced by other birds such as the ibis, the stork, the heron, all enemies and destroyers of reptiles.[5] Finally, in the third verse, the angels are said to be reciting the *dhikr* which is generally interpreted as meaning here the *Qur'ān*; not the *Qur'ān* that is expressed in human language, needless to say, but its eternal prototype inscribed on the 'Guarded Tablet' (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*), which like Jacob's ladder extends from the heavens to the earth, and therefore throughout all the degrees of universal existence.[6] Likewise, it is said in the Hindu tradition that the *Devas*, in their fight against the *Asuras*, protect themselves (*achhandayan*) by the recitation of the hymns of the *Veda*, and that it is for this reason that the hymns received the name of *chhandas*, a word which denotes 'rhythm'. The same idea is contained in the word *dhikr* which, in Islamic esoterism, is used of rhythmic formulas that correspond exactly to Hindu *mantras*. The repetition of these formulas aims at producing a harmonisation of the different elements of the being, and at causing vibrations which, by their repercussions throughout the immense hierarchy of states, are capable of opening up a communication with the higher states, which in a general way is the essential and primordial purpose of all rites.

This brings us back directly and very clearly to what was said above about the 'language of the birds', which we can also call 'angelic language', and of which the image in the human world is rhythmic speech; for the 'science of rhythm', which admits of many applications, is the ultimate basis of all the means that can be brought into action in order to enter into communication

3. The word *ṣaff* or 'rank', is one of those many words which have been suggested as the origin of the word *ṣūfi and taṣawwuf*; and although this derivation does not seem acceptable from a purely linguistic point of view, it is none the less true, as with many other derivations of the same kind, that it represents one of the ideas really contained in these terms; for the 'spiritual hierarchies' are essentially identical with the degrees of initiation.

4. This opposition is expressed in each being by the two tendencies, ascending and descending, called respectively *sattwa* and *tamas* by the Hindu doctrine. It is also that which Mazdeism symbolises by the antagonism between light and darkness, personified respectively by *Ormuzd* and *Ahriman*.

5. See on this subject the remarkable works of Louis Charbonneau-Lassay on the animal symbols of Christ (cf., *Le Bestiaire du Christ*). It is important to note that the symbolic opposition of bird and serpent does not apply except when the serpent is considered under its malefic aspect; on the contrary, under its benefic aspect it sometimes is united with the bird as in the case of *Quetzalcohuatl* of the ancient Meso-American traditions. Moreover, one also finds in Mexico the combat of the eagle with the serpent. As regards the association of bird and serpent, we can recall the Gospel text: 'Be ye wise as serpents and guileless as doves' (*Mt.* 10: 16).

6. On the symbolism of the book to which this directly relates, see *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 14.

with the higher states. That is why an Islamic tradition says that Adam, in the earthly Paradise, spoke in verse, that is, in rhythmic speech; this is related to that 'Syrian language' (*lughah suryaniyyah*) of which we spoke in our previous study on the 'science of letters',[7] and which must be regarded as translating directly the 'solar and angelic illumination' as this manifests itself in the centre of the human state. This is also why the Sacred Books are written in rhythmic language which, clearly, makes of them something quite other than the mere 'poems', in the purely profane sense, which the anti-traditional bias of the modern critics would have them to be. Moreover, in its origins poetry was by no means the vain 'literature' that it has become by a degeneration resulting from the downward march of the human cycle, and it had a truly sacred character.[8] Traces of this can be found up to classical antiquity in the West, when poetry was still called the 'language of the Gods', an expression equivalent to those we have indicated, in as much as the Gods, that is, the *Devas*,[9] are, like the angels, the representation of the higher states. In Latin, verses were called *carmina*, a designation relating to their use in the accomplishment of rites; for the word *carmen* is identical to the Sanskrit *karma* which must be taken here in its special sense of 'ritual action';[10] and the poet himself, interpreter of the 'sacred language' through which the divine Word appears, was *vates*, a word which defined him as endowed with an inspiration that was in some way prophetic. Later, by another degeneration, the *vates* was no longer anything more than a common 'diviner',[11] and the carmen (whence the English word '*charm*') no more than a 'spell', that is, an operation of low magic. There again is an example of the fact that magic, even sorcery, is what subsists as the last vestige of vanished traditions.[12]

7. [See 'The Science of Letters', above.]

8. It can be said, moreover, in a general way, that the arts and sciences have become profane by just this kind of degeneration which deprives them of their traditional nature and, by way of consequence, of any higher significance. We have spoken of this in *L'Ésotérisme de Dante*, ch. 2, and *The Crisis of the Modern World*, ch. 4 [see also *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 8].

9. The Sanskrit *Deva* and the Latin *deus* are one and the same word.

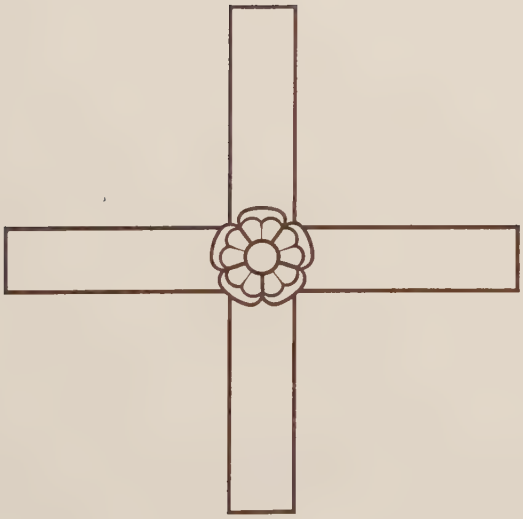
10. The word *poetry* also derives from the Greek *poiein* which has the same signification as the Sanskrit root *kri*, whence comes *karma*, which is found again in the Latin *creare* understood in its primitive acceptation; at the beginning, therefore, it was a question of something altogether different from a mere artistic or literary production in the profane sense that Aristotle seems to have had uniquely in view in speaking of what he called the 'poetic sciences'.

11. The word 'diviner' itself is no less deviant from its meaning; for etymologically it is nothing else than *divinus*, signifying here 'interpreter of the Gods'. The 'auspices' (from *aves spicere*, 'to observe the birds'), omens drawn from the flight and song of birds, are more closely related to the 'language of the birds', understood in this case in the most literal sense but nevertheless still identified with the 'language of the Gods', who were thought to manifest their will by means of these omens. The birds thus played the part of 'messengers', analogous—but on a very low plane—to the part that is generally attributed to the angels (whence their very name, for this is precisely the meaning of the Greek *aggelos*).

12. [On this question of the origins of magic and sorcery, see below, 22, 'Seth', the final paragraph.]

These few indications should be enough to show how inept it is to mock at stories that speak of the 'language of the birds'. It is all too easy and too simple to disdain as superstitions everything that one does not understand. But the ancients, for their part, knew very well what they meant when they used symbolic language. The real 'superstition', in the strictly etymological sense (*quod superstat*), is that which outlives itself, in short, the 'dead letter'. But even this very survival, however lacking in interest it may seem, is nevertheless not so contemptible; for the Spirit, which 'bloweth where it listeth' and when it listeth, can always come and revivify symbols and rites, and restore to them, along with their lost meaning, the plenitude of their original virtue.

Symbols of the Centre and of the World



10 § The Idea of the Centre in the Traditions of Antiquity

HAVING had occasion previously to allude to the 'Centre of the World' and to the various symbols which represent it,[1] we must now return to this idea of the Centre, which is of the greatest importance in all the ancient traditions, and indicate some of the chief meanings that are linked to it. For men of today this idea no longer immediately evokes all that the ancients saw in it. Here, as in all else that touches on symbolism, many things have been forgotten and certain modes of thinking seem to have become totally foreign to the great majority of our contemporaries. All the more reason,

1. ['Les Arbres du Paradis' (*Regnabit*, March 1926), the elements of which have been treated again in different parts of *The Symbolism of the Cross*. The final passage of this study is recalled here: 'We must add that if the tree is one of the chief symbols of the *axis mundi*, it is not the only one; the mountain is also one, and is common as such to many different traditions. The tree and the mountain are sometimes associated with one another. The stone itself (which, moreover, can be taken as a reduced representation of the mountain, though it is not only that) also plays the same part in certain cases; and this symbol of the stone, like that of the tree, is very often related to the serpent. We will doubtless have occasion to speak again of these various figures in other studies. But we must now point out that just as they all relate to the "Centre of the World", they are not without a more or less direct link with the symbol of the heart, so that in all this we have not digressed so far from the true object of this journal as some might believe; and we are about to return to it even more directly by a final observation.

We said that in a certain sense the Tree of Life is made accessible to man by the Redemption. In other words, one could also say that the true Christian is he who, virtually at least, is reintegrated into the rights and dignity of primordial humanity and who has, consequently, the possibility of re-entry into Paradise, into the abode of immortality. Doubtless, this reintegration will not be fully effected for collective humanity until "the new Jerusalem will descend from heaven to earth" (*Apocalypse* XXI), as this will be the perfect consummation of Christianity, coinciding with the no less perfect restoration of the state that preceded the Fall. It is equally true that already now the reintegration can be considered as a possibility for certain individuals, if not in a general way; and there, we believe, is the most complete significance of the "spiritual habitat" in the Heart of Christ of which Charbonneau-Lassay spoke recently ([*Regnabit*], January 1926), seeing that the Heart of Christ is truly the "Centre of the World" and the "abode of immortality".' We will recall that the idea of the 'Centre of the World' constitutes the fundamental theme of the work entitled *The Lord of the World*, which appeared in 1927 and in which the substance of the articles in *Regnabit* which treated this subject was taken up again almost in its entirety. On the same idea, see further *The Great Triad*, in particular ch. 15–17].

therefore, to insist on these points, in view of the general spread of an incomprehension which is more complete than ever.

The Centre is, above all, the origin, the point of departure of all things; it is the principial point, without form and without dimensions, therefore indivisible, and thus the only image that can be given to the primordial Unity. From it, by its radiation, all things are produced, just as unity produces all numbers without its essence being modified or affected in any way whatsoever. There is a complete parallelism here between two modes of expression, geometric symbolism and numerical symbolism, so that it makes no difference which is used, and it is perfectly natural to pass from the one to the other. It must not be forgotten, moreover, that in either case it is always a question of symbolism: arithmetical unity is not metaphysical Unity, but only its figure, a figure in which there is however nothing arbitrary, for there exists between the one and the other a real analogical relationship that makes it possible to transpose the idea of Unity beyond the domain of quantity into the transcendent. It is the same with the idea of the Centre, which is susceptible of a similar transposition whereby it is stripped of its spatial character, this being no longer evoked except as a symbol. Symbolically, the central point is the Principle, it is pure Being; and the space which it fills by its radiation and which itself only exists by that same radiation (the *fiat lux* of Genesis) without which it would be only 'privation' and nothingness, is the world in the widest sense of the word, the totality of all the beings and all the states of existence that constitute universal manifestation.

The simplest representation of the idea which we have been formulating is the point at the centre of a circle (*figure* 1): the point is the emblem of the

Figure 1

Figure 2

Principle, while the circle is that of the world. It is quite impossible to fix any origin in time whatsoever for the use of this figuration, for it is often to be found on prehistoric objects. No doubt we must see in it one of those signs which are linked directly to the Primordial Tradition. Sometimes the point is surrounded by concentric circles which seem to represent the different states or degrees of manifested existence, arranged hierarchically according to their greater or lesser distance from the primordial Principle. The point at the centre of the circle has been taken also, and probably from very ancient times, as a figure of the sun, because the sun is truly, in the physical domain, the Centre or 'Heart of the World'; and this figure has remained until our own time as the usual astrological and astronomical sign for the sun. It is perhaps for this reason that most archeologists, wherever they find this symbol, claim for it an exclusively solar significance, while in reality it has a far vaster and deeper meaning. They forget, if ever they knew, that the

sun, from the standpoint of all the traditions of antiquity, is itself only a symbol, that of the 'Centre of the World', which is the Divine Principle.

The relationship which exists between the centre and the circumference, or between what they respectively represent, is already indicated clearly enough by the fact that the circumference cannot exist without its centre, while the centre is entirely independent of the circumference. This relationship can be denoted even more precisely and explicitly by the rays issuing from the centre and ending at the circumference. These rays can of course be depicted in a variety of numbers, since they really are indefinitely numerous, as are the points on the circumference which are their extremities. But in fact, for figurations of this kind, numbers that have in themselves a particular symbolic value have always been chosen. The simplest of such forms is that which has only four rays dividing the circle into equal parts, that is two radii at right angles forming a cross inside the circumference (*figure* 2). This new figure is of the same general significance as the first, but has attached to it certain secondary significations which complete it: the circumference, if represented as having to be followed in a particular direction, is the image of a cycle of manifestation, such as the cosmic cycles, the theory of which is especially well developed in Hindu doctrine. The divisions marked on the circumference by the extremities of the branches of the cross will then correspond to the different periods or phases into which the cycle is divided; and such a division can be interpreted on diverse scales according to whether the cycles in question are of greater or lesser extent. Thus, for example, keeping only to the order of terrestrial existence, there are the four main periods of the day, the four phases of the moon, the four seasons of the year; and also, following the conception that we find in the traditions of India and Central America as well as those of Greco-Latin antiquity, that of the four ages of humanity. We indicate these considerations only summarily in order to give a general idea of what the symbol in question expresses. All this is connected more directly to what we will have to say in the remarks that follow.

Among the figures which comprise a greater number of rays, we must mention especially the wheels or 'rounds' which most commonly have six or eight radii (*figures* 3 and 4). The Celtic 'round' which was perpetuated

Figure 3

Figure 4

throughout almost all the Middle Ages, is found in both these forms; these same figures, and especially the second, are to be met with very often in oriental lands, especially in Chaldea and Assyria, in India (where the wheel is called *chakra*) and in Tibet. On the other hand, there is a close kinship

between the wheel of six spokes and the chrismon[2] which only differs from it in that the circumference which marks the extremities of the rays is not normally drawn. Now the wheel, instead of being simply a 'solar' sign as is commonly thought in our time, is before all else a symbol of the world, which can be understood without difficulty. In the symbolic language of India, one speaks constantly of the 'wheel of things' or of the 'wheel of life', which corresponds precisely to this signification. There is also the question of the 'wheel of the Law', an expression which Buddhism has borrowed, as with many others, from earlier doctrines and which, originally at least, refers especially to cyclic theories. It must be added that the Zodiac is also represented in the form of a wheel, naturally of twelve spokes, and that the name given it in Sanskrit signifies literally 'wheel of signs', according to the primary sense of the word *rashi* which serves to designate the signs of the Zodiac.[3]

The wheel has likewise a connection with various floral symbols;[4] for certain cases at least we could even have spoken of a real equivalence.[5] To take a symbolic flower such as the lotus, the lily, or the rose,[6] their blossoming represents, among other things (for these symbols have multiple significations) and by a quite understandable sameness of meaning, the development of manifestation. This blossoming, moreover is a radiation around the Centre, for here also it is a question of 'centred' figures, and it is this which justifies their assimilation to the wheel.[7] In the Hindu tradition, the world is sometimes represented in the form of a lotus, in the centre of which rises *Meru*, the sacred mountain which symbolises the Pole.

But let us return to the meanings of the Centre, for until now we have expounded only the first of all, that which makes of it an image of the

2. [The author was referring here to his article in *Regnabit*, November 1925, on 'Le Chrisme et le Coeur dans les anciennes marques corporatives', a text not included in the present collection but treated again in two articles in *Etudes Traditionnelles* which here form chapters 52 ('Symbols of Analogy') and 69 ('The "Sign of Four" ').]

3. Let it be noted also that the "wheel of Fortune", in the symbolism of Western antiquity, is very closely related to the 'wheel of the Law' and also, though it may not seem so evident at first glance, to the zodiacal wheel.

4. [See below ch. 11 ('Symbolic Flowers') and 42 ('Symbols of Analogy').]

5. Among other indications of this equivalence, as far as concerns its recognition in the Middle Ages, we have seen the wheel of eight spokes and a flower of eight petals represented, one opposite the other, on the same sculptured stone, fitted into the façade of the ancient church of St-Mexme of Chinon, and probably dating from the Carolingian period.

6. The lily has six petals; the lotus, in representations of the most common type, has eight; the two forms correspond therefore to the wheels of six and eight spokes. As to the rose, it is figured with a variable number of petals, which may modify the meaning or at least give it various nuances. On the symbolism of the rose, see the very interesting article of Charbonneau-Lassay (*Regnabit*, March 1926).

7. In the figure of the chrismon (or labarum) from the Merovingian age, which has been reproduced by Charbonneau-Lassay (*Regnabit*, March 1926, p. 298), the central rose has six petals which are oriented according to the branches of the chrismon; and as to the chrismon itself, it is enclosed in a circle which brings out its identity with the six-spoked wheel as clearly as possible.

Principle. We shall find another of its significations in the fact that the Centre is strictly the 'midmost', the point which is equidistant from all points of the circumference and which divides each diameter into two equal parts. So far the Centre has been considered as prior to the circumference, which has no reality apart from the centre's radiation; now it is to be seen in relation to the realized circumference, that is, as a symbol of the action of the Principle at the heart of creation. The point midmost between the extremes, represented by opposite points on the circumference, is the place where contrary tendencies, ending at these extremes, are neutralized so to speak and are in perfect equilibrium. Certain schools of Muslim esoterism, which attribute to the cross a symbolic value of the highest importance, refer to the centre of this cross as the 'divine station' (*al-maqām al-ilāhī*), and they designate this centre as the place where all contraries are unified, where all oppositions are resolved.[8] The idea expressed here more particularly is, therefore, that of equilibrium; and this idea is really one with that of harmony. These are not two different ideas, but two aspects of the same idea. There is yet a third aspect to this symbolism, linked especially to the moral point of view (though admitting of other significations also), and this is the idea of justice. One can thereby relate to what we have just said the Platonic concept of virtue as a just mean between two extremes. From a much more universal point of view, the Far Eastern traditions speak unceasingly of the 'Invariable Middle' which is the point where the 'Activity of Heaven' is manifested; and according to Hindu doctrine, at the centre of every being, as of every state of existence, there resides a reflection of the supreme Principle.

Equilibrium itself moreover is nothing other than the reflection in the manifested order of the absolute immutability of the Principle. To see things under this new relationship, the circumference must be considered as being in motion around its centre which alone does not participate in this movement. The very name of the wheel (*rota*) immediately evokes the idea of rotation; and this rotation is the figure of the continual change to which all manifested things are subject. In such a movement, there is but one single point that remains fixed and immutable, and this point is the Centre. This brings us back to the cyclic concept we spoke of earlier: the course of any cycle, or the rotation of the circumference, is succession, whether in temporal or some other mode. The fixity of the Centre is the image of Eternity, where all things are present in perfect simultaneity. The circumference can only turn around a fixed centre; likewise, change, which does not suffice unto itself, necessarily supposes a principle which is outside change. This is the 'unmoved mover' of Aristotle[9] which again is represented by the Centre. Thus at the same time, since all that exists, all that changes or moves, has no reality apart from the immutable Principle on which it totally depends, this Principle is that which gives motion its first impulse and also that which, subsequently, governs

8. [Cf., *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 7.]
9. [See below ch. 20, 'Some Aspects of the Symbolism of Janus'.]

and directs it, which gives it its law, the conservation of the order of the world being in a way nothing but a prolongation of the creative act. The Principle is, according to a Hindu expression, the 'Internal Co-ordinator' (*antaryāmī*), for it directs all things from within, itself residing at the innermost point of all, which is the Centre.[10]

Instead of the rotation of a circumference around its centre, we can also consider that of a sphere rotating around a fixed axis, the symbolic significance of which is exactly the same. This is why representations of the 'World Axis' are so numerous and so important in all the ancient traditions; and the general meaning of this last symbol is fundamentally the same as that of the figures of the 'Centre of the World', except perhaps that these figures evoke the function of the immutable Principle with regard to universal manifestation more directly than the other relationships under which the Centre may also be considered. When the sphere, terrestrial or celestial revolves round its axis, there are on that sphere two points which remain fixed: these are the poles, which are the extremities of the axis or its points of contact with the surface of the sphere; and this is why the idea of the Pole is yet another equivalent of the idea of the Centre. The symbolism which relates to the Pole, and which sometimes takes on very complex forms, is thus to be found in all traditions and may even be said to hold in them a place of considerable importance.[11]

One of the most striking figures which sums up the ideas that we have been expounding is the *swastika* (*figures* 5 and 6), which is essentially the 'sign of

Figure 5

Figure 6

the Pole'.[12] It would seem, moreover, that in modern Europe its true significance has never yet been made known. Vain attempts have been made to explain this symbol by the most fantastic theories, even to the point of seeing in it the outline of a primitive instrument for making fire. In fact, if it sometimes actually has a certain relationship with fire, that is for quite different reasons. Most often it is made out to be a 'solar' sign, which it could only have become accidentally and in a rather indirect way. We might repeat here what we said above in connection with the wheel and the point at the

10. [Cf., *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 14 and below in the present work, ch. 74 'The Mustard Seed' and 76 'The Divine City'.]

11. [On the symbolism of the Pole, see especially *The Lord of the World*, ch. 2, 7, 8, 9 and 10; and see below, 17, 'A Hieroglyph of the Pole'.]

12. [Most of what follows about the *swastika* has been treated again, along with additional material, in *The Lord of the World* ch. 2, and *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 10. The unity of the text, however, obliges us to retain it, except for a few footnotes which would be superfluous at this point.]

centre of the circle. Those who have been closest to the truth are they who have considered the *swastika* as a symbol of movement, but this interpretation is still insufficient, for it is not a question of just any movement, but of a rotation around a centre or an immutable axis; and it is precisely the fixed point that is the essential element to which the symbol in question directly relates. The other meanings which this same figure comprises are all derived from this one. The Centre imparts movement to all things; and as movement represents life, the *swastika* becomes thereby a symbol of life or, more precisely, the vivifying function of the Principle in relation to the cosmic order.

If we compare the *swastika* with the figure of the cross inscribed in the circumference (*figure* 2), we can see that fundamentally these are two equivalent symbols. But the rotation, instead of being represented by the tracing of the circumference, is indicated in the *swastika* only by the lines at right angles to the extremities of the branches of the cross. These lines are tangents to the circumference, which mark the directions of movement at the corresponding points. As the circumference represents the World, the fact that it is only implied, so to speak, indicates very clearly that the *swastika* is not a figure of the World, but rather of the action of the Principle with regard to the World.[13]

When the *swastika* is related to the rotation of a sphere such as the celestial sphere around its axis, it must be considered as traced on the equatorial plane, and then the central point will be the projection of the axis onto this plane which is perpendicular to it. As for the direction of the rotation indicated by the figure, the importance is only secondary. In fact, both the one and the other of the two forms which we have reproduced above[14] are to be found, nor is it necessary to see in this an intention of establishing between them any kind of opposition.[15] We are well aware that in certain countries and at certain times, the partisans of schisms may have deliberately given this figure an orientation contrary to the one prevailing in the circles which they themselves were breaking away from, in order to

13. The same remark would be equally valid for the chrismon as compared to the wheel.

14. The word *swastika* is, in Sanskrit, the only one that serves in all cases to designate the symbol in question. The term *sauwastika*, which some have applied to one of the two forms in order to distinguish it from the other (which alone would then be the true *swastika*), in reality is only an adjective derived from *swastika*, indicating that which is related to this symbol or to its meanings.

15. The same remark could be made for other symbols, and in particular for the chrismon (labarum) of Constantine, in which the P is sometimes reversed. It has been thought that it must then be considered as a sign of the Antichrist; this intention may have existed in certain cases, but there are other cases where it is manifestly impossible to admit it (for example, in the catacombs). Similarly, the corporative 'sign of four', which moreover, is only a modification of this same P of the chrismon [see chapter 69], is turned either in one direction or the other, without it being possible to attribute this fact to a rivalry between various guilds or to a desire to differentiate themselves one from another, for the two forms are found in marks pertaining to the same guild.

affirm their antagonism by an outward manifestation; but that in no way touches the essential significance of the symbol, which remains the same in every case.

The *swastika* is far from being exclusively an oriental symbol, as is sometimes believed. In reality it is one of the most widespread of all, and it is to be found nearly everywhere from the Far East to the Far West, for it even exists among certain indigenous peoples of North America. At the present time, it continues to be used especially in India and in Central and East Asia, and it is probably only in these regions that its real significance is still known, though even in Europe it has not disappeared entirely.[16] In Lithuania and Courland, peasants still trace this sign on their houses; doubtless they are no longer aware of what it means, and see in it only a sort of protective talisman; but perhaps what is most curious is that they give it the Sanskrit name of *swastika*.[17] In antiquity this sign was particularly prevalent among the Celts and in prehellenic Greece;[18] yet again, and still in the West, as M. Charbonneau-Lassay has remarked,[19] it was one of the early emblems of Christ, and even remained in use as such until towards the end of the Middle Ages. Like the point at the centre of the circle and like the wheel, this sign incontestably goes back to prehistoric times; and for our part, we see in it, without the least hesitation, one of the vestiges of the Primordial Tradition.[20]

We have not yet finished indicating all the meanings of the Centre. If it is first of all a point of departure, it is also a terminal point. All has come from the Centre, and all must finally return to it. As all things exist only by the Principle and could not subsist without it, there must be between them and it a permanent bond, represented by rays joining to the Centre all points on the circumference. But these rays can be traversed in two opposite directions; first from the Centre to the circumference, and then returning from the circumference to the Centre. There are, as it were, two complementary phases, the first represented by a centrifugal movement and the second by a centripetal movement. These two phases can be compared to those of respiration according to a symbolism to which the Hindu doctrines often refer; and on the other hand, they have a no less remarkable analogy

16. We are not alluding here to the entirely artificial use of the *swastika* by certain German political groups which, quite arbitrarily, have made it a sign of antisemitism, under the pretext that this emblem belonged to the so-called 'Aryan race'; all this is pure fantasy.

17. Lithuanian is, moreover, of all the European languages, that which most resembles Sanskrit.

18. Various forms of the *swastika* exist, for example a form with curved branches (having the appearance of two crossed S), which we have seen on a Gallic coin. On the other hand, certain figures that are no longer anything more than purely decorative, such as the 'Greek key' or 'Greek border', are derived from the *swastika*.

19. *Regnabit*, March 1926, pp. 302–303.

20. [On the *swastika*, see also ch. 19 below.]

with the physiological function of the heart. In fact, the blood leaves the heart, is diffused throughout the organism which it vivifies, then returns to the heart, whose function as organic centre is thus truly complete and altogether corresponds to the idea that, in a general way, we must form of the Centre in the fullness of its significance.

All beings, dependent on the Principle in all that they are, must consciously or unconsciously aspire to return to it. This tendency to return towards the Centre has, in all traditions, its symbolic representation. We refer to ritual orientation, which is strictly speaking the direction towards a spiritual centre, a terrestrial and perceptible image of the veritable 'Centre of the World'. The orientation of Christian churches is only a particular case of this and relates essentially to the same idea which is common to all religions. In Islam, this orientation (*qiblah*) is as the materialisation, so to speak, of the intention (*niyyah*) by which all the powers of the being must be directed towards the Divine Principle,[21] and many other examples can easily be found. Much more could be said on this question, but no doubt we shall have some opportunities of returning to it later,[22] and this is why we shall limit ourselves for the moment to no more than a brief indication of the last aspect of the symbolism of the Centre.

To sum up, the Centre is both the principle and the end of all things; it is, according to a well known symbolism, the *alpha* and the *omega*. Better still, it is the beginning, the middle, and the end; and these three aspects are represented in the monosyllable *AUM*, to which Charbonneau-Lassay alluded as emblem of Christ and the association of which with the *swastika*, among the signs of the monastery of the Carmelites of Loudun, seems to us particularly significant.[23] In fact, this symbol, much more complete than the *alpha* and the *omega*, and susceptible of meanings which can be developed almost indefinitely, is, by one of the most astonishing concordances that one could encounter, common to the ancient Hindu tradition and to Christian esoterism of the Middle Ages; and in both cases, it is also *par excellence* a symbol of the Word, which is in very truth the real 'Centre of the World'.[24]

21. The word 'intention' must be taken here in its strict etymological sense (*in-tendere*, to tend towards).

22. [See *The Lord of the World*, ch. 8.]

23. [Here are the words of Charbonneau-Lassay: "... At the end of the fifteenth century, or of the sixteenth, a monk of the monastery of Loudun, Brother Guyot, decorated the walls of the stairway of his chapel with a whole series of esoteric emblems of Jesus Christ, of which some of them, several times repeated, are of Oriental origin, such as the *Swastika* and the *Sauwastika*, the *AUM* and the *Crucified Serpent* (*Regnabit*, March 1926).]

24. [René Guénon had already treated the symbolism of the monosyllable *AUM* in *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 16. Subsequently, he again spoke of it on different occasions, especially in *The Lord of the World*, ch. 4. It is also referred to in the present work in 21 below, 'The Hieroglyph of Cancer' and 24, 'Some Aspects of the Symbolism of the Fish'.]

11 § Symbolic Flowers

It is well known that the use of flowers in symbolism is widespread and that it is to be found in most traditions. It is also a very complex symbolism, and our intention here can only be to point out some of the more general meanings. It is obvious, in fact, that the sense of a floral symbol may vary, at least in its secondary modalities, according to the particular flower taken as symbol, and also, as is generally the case in symbolism, that each flower can itself have a plurality of meanings, which may be bound up with each other by certain correspondences.

One of the chief meanings of floral symbolism is that which relates to the feminine or passive principle of manifestation, *Prakriti* or universal substance. In this respect, the flower is equivalent to a number of other symbols, among which the most important is the cup. Like the cup, the flower by its very form evokes the notion of 'receptacle', which *Prakriti* is as regards the influences emanating from *Purusha*, and one commonly speaks of the *calyx* [i.e., cup or chalice] of a flower. On the other hand, the blossoming of this same flower simultaneously represents the development of manifestation itself, considered as a production of *Prakriti*. This double sense is particularly clear in a case such as that of the lotus which, in the East, is the symbolic flower of flowers and which has the special characteristic of blooming on the surface of the water; and as we have explained elsewhere, this surface always represents the domain of a certain state of manifestation, or the plane of reflection of the 'celestial Ray' which expresses the influence of *Purusha* exercised on this domain in order to realise the possibilities potentially contained therein, enveloped in the primordial indifferentiation of *Prakriti*.[1]

The above mentioned connection between flower and cup naturally brings to mind the symbolism of the Grail in the Western traditions. We have already seen that among the various objects traditionally associated with the Grail there is a lance which, in the Christian adaptation of the legend, is the lance of the centurion Longinus that made, in the side of Christ, the wound from which flowed the blood and water that Joseph of Arimathea collected in the chalice used at the Last Supper; but it is nonetheless true that this lance or one of its equivalents already existed as a complementary symbol to the chalice or cup in pre-Christian traditions.[2] The lance, in a vertical position, is one form of the 'World Axis' which is identical with the 'celestial Ray' that we just mentioned; and in this connection, it can be recalled also that the solar ray is frequently assimilated to weapons such as the lance or the arrow, though it would be out of place to dwell on these weapons here. On the other hand, in certain representations, the drops of blood fall from the

1. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 24.
2. See above, p. 31.

lance itself into the cup; now these drops of blood, in their principial significance, are an image of the influences emanating from *Purusha*, which evokes the Vedic symbol of the sacrifice of *Purusha* at the origin of manifestation.[3]

12 § The Triple Precinct of the Druids

Paul Le Cour called attention, in *Atlantis* (July–August 1928), to a curious symbol on the druidic stone discovered about 1800 at Suèvres (Loir-et-Cher). It had been previously examined by E. C. Florance, president of the Society of Natural History and Anthropology of Loir-et-Cher. Florance thinks that the locality where the stone was found may have been the place of the Druids' annual reunion which, according to Caesar, was situated on the borders of the land of the Carnutes.[1] His attention was drawn by the fact that the same sign is on a seal of a Gallo-Roman oculist, found about 1870 at Villefranche-sur-Cher (Loir-et-Cher); and he suggests that what is represented was a sacred triple precinct. For this symbol is, in fact, formed by three concentric squares, linked to one another by four lines at right angles (*figure 7*).

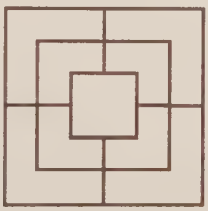


Figure 7

At the time when the article appeared in *Atlantis*, the same symbol was pointed out to Florance, cut into a large foundation stone of a buttress of the church of Saint Gemme (Loire-et-Cher), a stone, moreover, which appears to have a provenance from a time prior to the construction of this church and which could likewise go back even to Druidism. It is certain that like many other Celtic symbols, and especially that of the wheel, this figure remained in use until the Middle Ages, for Charbonneau-Lassay has

3. In certain respects one could also relate this to the well known symbolism of the pelican.

1. Caesar says: *in finibus Carnutum*; the interpretation seems to us a little doubtful, for *fines* does not always signify borders, but often designates the country itself. On the other hand, it does not seem that anything has been found at Suèvres that recalls the *Omphalos* which in the *Mediolanon* or *Medionemeton* of Gaul had to be represented by a menhir, according to the usages of the Celtic peoples.

mentioned it among the 'graffiti' of the dungeon of Chinon,[2] together with another no less ancient figure, formed by eight rays and circumscribed by a square (*figure* 8), which is on the *baetyl* of Kermaria studied by M. J. Loth[3] and to which we have already had occasion to allude.[4]

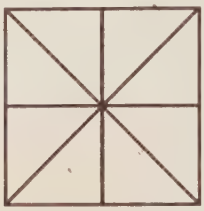


Figure 8

Le Cour indicates that the symbol of the triple square is to be found also at Rome, in the cloister of San Paolo, dating from the thirteenth century, and that it was known by others in antiquity as well as by the Celts, as he himself has pointed out several times in connection with the Acropolis of Athens, on the flagstones of the Parthenon and on those of the Erechtheion.

2. 'Le Cœur rayonnant du donjon du Chinon'.

3. 'L'Omphalos chez les Celts' in *Revue des Études anciennes*, July–Sept. 1915 [For this significance of the *baetyl* see, below, 27, 'Thunderbolts'.]

4. *The Lord of the World*, ch. 9; in *Regnabit*, June 1926. [This article was included by the author in *The Lord of the World*, but without certain points concerning the stone in question, whence the following quotation from it which is pertinent to the present study: 'A remarkable example of the *Omphalos* is the *baetyl* of Kermaria, near Pont-l'Abbé (Finistère), its general form being that of a regular cone rounded off at the top. There is a sinuous line on the lower part which may be only the stylised form of a serpent .... The summit is encircled with a Greek key design. On one side there is a *swastika*; and the presence of this sign (of which the Greek key is a derivative) would suffice to confirm as clearly as possible the meaning of this curious monument. On the other side there is another no less interesting symbol; this is a figure of eight rays circumscribed by a square instead of a circle as with the wheel. This design is therefore completely comparable to the British flag which, similarly, must be of Celtic origin. What is most strange is that this sign of the *baetyl* of Kermaria is exactly reproduced in several instances in the graffiti of the dungeon of Chinon .... And in the same graffiti, there is again the figure of eight rays drawn on the oval shield held by a kneeling person (note: this shield clearly recalls the wheel of eight spokes, just as that of the allegorical figure of Albion, having the same form, recalls the wheel of six spokes ...). This sign must have played a large part in the symbolism of the Templars, for 'it is to be found also in ancient commanderies of the Temple (note: the same figure, moreover, has been preserved even up to modern Masonry, but there it is considered only as the "key of the numbers", and it is shown that it is in fact possible to break it down so as to obtain all the Arabic numerals in a more or less schematic form.) It is to be seen likewise as a heraldic sign on a great escutcheon at the head of a funerary statue of a Templar, from the thirteenth century, of the commandary of Roche-en-Cloué (Vienne) and on a carved stone in the commandery of Mauleon, near Châtillon-sur-Sèvre (Deux-Sèvres)' (Charbonneau-Lassay, 'Le Cœur rayonnant du donjon du Chinon', p. 16). This last figuration is, moreover, that of a wheel in the strict sense; and it is only one example among many others, of the continuation of the Celtic traditions throughout the Middle Ages. We have yet to point out, in connection with this symbol, that one of the chief significations of the number 8 is that of "justice" and "equilibrium", ideas which, as we have shown, are directly attached to that of the Centre (the importance of the *Ogdoade* for the Pythagoreans is also well known)'.]

The interpretation of this symbol as representing a triple precinct seems to us very right, and Le Cour, in this connection, establishes a parallel with the remarks of Plato who, speaking of the mother city of the Atlanteans, describes the palace of Poseidon as built at the centre of three concentric enclosures linked together by canals which, in fact, form a figure analogous to the one here in question, though circular instead of square.

Now what can be the significance of these three precincts? We thought at once that it must be a question of three degrees of initiation, so that, taken all together, they would have been in some way a figure of the Druid hierarchy; and the fact that this same figure is to be found elsewhere and not merely with the Celts would indicate that there were in other traditions hierarchies formed on this same model, which is perfectly normal. The division of initiation into three grades is, moreover, the most frequent partition and, we may say, the most fundamental. All the others, generally speaking, represent only its subdivisions or more or less complicated developments. We reached this conclusion because previously we had knowledge of documents which in certain masonic systems of the higher grades describe these grades precisely as so many successive precincts drawn around a central point.[5] It is true that these documents are incomparably less ancient than the monuments in question, but they nevertheless give us an echo of very much older traditions, and in any case, as regards our present theme, they have given us a starting point for interesting comparisons.

It should be noted that the explanation which we have just put forward is in no way incompatible with certain others, such as that of Le Cour, which relates the three precincts to the three circles of existence recognized by the Celtic tradition. These three circles, which are to be found under another form in Christianity, are the same as the 'three worlds' of Hinduism, which moreover sometimes represents the celestial circles as so many precincts around *Meru*, the sacred mountain that symbolises the 'Pole' or the World Axis [*axis mundi*], and this is yet another most remarkable concordance. Far from being mutually exclusive, the two explanations harmonize perfectly; it can even be said that they coincide in a certain sense, for where genuine initiation is concerned, its degrees correspond to so many states of the being, and it is these states which in all traditions are described as so many different worlds, for it must be clearly understood that 'localisation' has only a purely symbolic character. We have already explained, in connection with Dante, that the heavens are strictly speaking 'spiritual hierarchies', that is, degrees of initiation;[6] and it goes without saying that at the same time they relate to the degrees of universal existence, for as we said then,[7] in virtue of the constitutive analogy of the Macrocosm and Microcosm, the initiatic process rigorously reproduces the cosmogonic process. We will add that, generally speaking,

5. Le Cour notes that the central point is marked on the greater number of the figures that he saw at the Acropolis of Athens.

6. *L'Esotérisme de Dante*, ch. 2.

7. *Ibid*, ch. 6.

genuine initiatic interpretation is never exclusive but, on the contrary, includes within itself synthetically all other possible interpretations; and this, moreover, is why symbolism, with its multiple and superimposed senses, is the normal means of expression of all true initiatic teaching.

With this explanation, the meaning of the four lines arranged in the form of a cross and connecting the three precincts immediately becomes very clear: they are the channels by which the teaching of the traditional doctrine is communicated downwards from above, from the supreme grade, which is its trustee, down to the other degrees, in hierarchic order. The central part of the figure therefore corresponds to the 'fountain of teaching' of which Dante and the Fedeli d'Amore[8] speak, and the cruciform arrangement of the four channels which flow from it identifies them with the four rivers of *Pardes*.

In this connection it should be noted that between the circular and square forms of the triple precinct figure, there is an important nuance: they relate respectively to the earthly Paradise and the celestial Jerusalem, as has been explained in one of our books.[9] There is always analogy and correspondence between the beginning and the end of any cycle; but at the end, the circle is replaced by the square, and this indicates the realisation of what the Hermetists designated symbolically as the 'squaring of the circle'.[10] The sphere, which represents the development of possibilities by the expansion of the primordial point, is transformed into a cube when this development is completed and when the final equilibrium is attained by the cycle in question.[11] To apply these considerations more particularly to our present theme, let us say that the circular form must represent the outset of a tradition, which is indeed the case where Atlantis is concerned,[12] and the square form represents its terminal point, corresponding to the constitution of a derivative traditional form. In the first case, the centre of the figure then would be the source of doctrine, while

8. See our article in *Le Voile d'Isis*, February 1929, '*Le Langage Secret de Dante et des "Fidèles d'Amour"*'.

9. *The Lord of the World*, ch. 11; on the relations between the earthly Paradise and the celestial Jerusalem, see also *L'Esotérisme de Dante*, ch. 8.

10. This 'squaring' cannot be achieved in 'becoming' or in the movement of the cycle, as it expresses the fixation that results from the 'passage to the limit'. All cyclic movement is, strictly speaking, indefinite, so the limit cannot be reached successively and analytically by running through all the points that correspond to each moment of the development of manifestation.

11. It would be easy to make a comparison here with the masonic symbol of the 'cubic stone' which is related also to the idea of achievement and perfection, that is the realisation of the plenitude of possibilities implicit in a certain state. [Cf., below, ch. 50, 'Black Stone, Cubic Stone'].

12. It must be pointed out that the Atlantean tradition is not, however, the Primordial Tradition for the present *Maha Yuga* and that it is itself only secondary in relation to the hyperborean tradition. It is only in a relative way that it can be taken as a starting point, to mark the onset of a certain period which is no more than one of the subdivisions of the *Mahā Yuga* [In *The Lord of the World* Guénon gives *Maha Yuga* as synonym of *Manvantara*. But in fact, as he later learned, *Manvantara* denotes a much longer cycle. We have therefore replaced *Manvantara* here throughout by *Mahā Yuga*, as no doubt he would have done, if he had been able to revise the contents of this book. Ed.]

in the second it would strictly speaking be the reservoir, the spiritual authority having here especially a role of conservation. But naturally, the symbolism of the 'fountain of teaching' is applicable in both cases.[13]

From the point of view of numerical symbolism it must also be noted that the three squares taken together form the duodenary. Arranged differently (*figure* 9), these three squares to which are added four crosswise lines

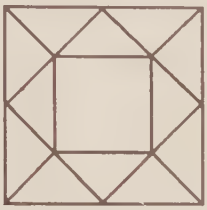


Figure 9

constitute the figure according to which the ancient astrologers inscribed the zodiac. This figure, in addition, was regarded as that of the celestial Jerusalem with its twelve gates, three on each side; and there is here an obvious relation with the meaning we have just pointed out for the square form. No doubt there would be still many more relationships to consider, but we think that these several notes, incomplete as they may be, will help shed some light on the mysterious question of the triple precinct of the Druids.

13 § The Guardians of the Holy Land

AMONG the prerogatives of the orders of chivalry, and especially of the Templars, one of the best known but generally not best understood, is that of 'guardians of the Holy Land'. Admittedly, if we restrict ourselves to its most outward meaning we find an immediate explanation in the connection between these orders and the Crusades, since for Christians as well as for Jews the 'Holy Land' seems to designate nothing other than Palestine.

13. The other figure above (*figure* 8) often appears in a circular form; it is then one of the more common varieties of the wheel, and this wheel of eight spokes is in certain respects an equivalent of the lotus of eight petals peculiar to the oriental traditions, just as the wheel of six spokes is the equivalent of the lily which has six petals (see our article on 'Le Chrisme et le Cœur dans les anciennes marques corporatives' [cf., 'Symbols of Analogy', 52 below, and 'The Idea of the Centre in the Traditions of Antiquity', 10 above.]

Nevertheless, the question becomes more complex when we note that several oriental organisations, the initiatic character of which is not in doubt, such as the Assassins and the Druse, have also taken the same title of 'guardians' of the Holy Land'. In such a case it can in fact no longer be a question of Palestine; and it is, moreover, remarkable that these organisations have quite a large number of features in common with the Western orders of chivalry and that historically some of them have even had relations with these orders. What, then are we really to understand by 'Holy Land', and what does this function of 'guardian' correspond to, seeming, as it does, to be attached to a specific kind of initiation, one that can be described as 'chivalric' if we give this term a meaning which is wider than usual but amply justified by the analogies that exist between the different forms in question?

We have already shown elsewhere, especially in *The Lord of the World*, that the expression 'Holy Land' has several synonyms: 'Pure Land', 'Land of Saints', 'Land of the Blessed', 'Land of the Living', 'Land of Immortality', that these equivalent designations are to be found in the traditions of all peoples, and that they always apply essentially to a spiritual centre, the location of which in a given region can, according to circumstances, be understood literally or symbolically, or simultaneously in both the one and the other sense. Every 'Holy Land' is designated further by expressions such as 'Centre of the World' or 'Heart of the World', and this calls for some explanations, for these uniform appellations, although differently applied, can easily lead to certain confusions.

If, for example, we consider the Hebraic tradition, we see that the *Sepher Ietsirah* speaks of the 'Holy Palace' or 'Inner Palace', which is the veritable 'Centre of the World', in the cosmogonic sense of the term; and we also see that the 'Holy Palace' has its image in the human world by the abode of the *Shekinah* in a particular place, the *Shekinah* being the 'real Presence' of the Divinity.[1] For the people of Israel, this abode of the *Shekinah* was the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*) which, for this reason, was considered by them as the 'Heart of the World' because it was in fact the spiritual centre of their own tradition. This centre, moreover, was not initially a fixed location; where nomads are concerned, as was the case here, their spiritual centre must move about with them, even while remaining always the same in the course of their peregrinations. 'The abode of the *Shekinah*', said Paul Vulliaud, 'was not fixed until the time the Temple was constructed, for which David had prepared the gold, the silver, and all that was necessary for Solomon to complete the work.[2] The Tabernacle of the Holiness of *Jehovah*,[3] the abode of the *Shekinah*, is the Holy of

1. See our articles on 'Le Cœur du Monde dans la Kabbale hébraïque' and 'La Terre sainte et le Cœur du Monde' in *Regnabit*, July–August and Sept–Oct 1926. [These articles are partly included in *The Lord of the World*, ch. 3 and 6, and partly in *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 4 and 7.]

2. It is well to note here the assimilation frequently established between the construction of the Temple, conceived in its ideal significance, and the 'Great Work' of the Hermetists.

3. [The word Jehovah is in fact an incorrect transliteration of the *Tetragrammaton* resulting from the addition of the vowel points of *Adonai* to the four Hebrew consonants (*yodh, he, vau, he*) which constitute the primary Divine Name of the Hebrews, *Yahweh*. Tr.]

Holies which is the Heart of the Temple, which is itself the Centre of Zion (Jerusalem), as holy Zion is centre of the Land of Israel, as the Land of Israel is the centre of the world'.[4] It may be noted here that there is a series of extensions given gradually to the idea of the centre in the applications of it which are successively made, so that the appellation 'Centre of the World' or 'Heart of the World' is finally extended to the entire Land of Israel insofar as this is considered the 'Holy Land'; and it must be added that in the same respect it also receives, among other denominations, that of 'Land of the Living'. It is said that the 'Land of the Living Comprises seven Lands', and Vulliaud observes that 'this land is Canaan in which there were seven peoples'[5], which is exact in a literal sense even though a symbolic interpretation is equally possible. This expression of 'Land of the Living' is equally synonymous with 'place of immortality', and the Catholic liturgy[6] applies it to the celestial sojourn of the elect which was represented by the Promised Land, in that Israel, on entering this land, was to see the end of its tribulations. From yet another point of view, the Land of Israel, as spiritual centre, was an image of Heaven; for according to the Judaic tradition, 'all that the Israelites do on earth is accomplished according to the pattern of what takes place in the celestial world'.[7]

What is said here of the Israelites can be said similarly of all peoples possessing a genuinely orthodox tradition; and in fact the Israelites are not the only people who have assimilated their country to the 'Heart of the World', and who have regarded it as an image of Heaven, two ideas which after all are only one in reality. The use of the same symbolism is found with other peoples who possess a 'Holy Land', that is, a country where a spiritual centre has been established which has for them a status comparable to that of the Temple of Jerusalem. In this respect, the 'Holy Land' is similar to the *Omphalos* which was always the visible image of the 'Centre of the World' for the people inhabiting the region where it was placed.[8]

The symbolism we are discussing is found especially among the Egyptians; in fact, according to Plutarch, 'the Egyptians give their country the name *Chemia*[9] and they compare it to a heart'.[10] The reason given by this author is somewhat strange: 'This country is in fact warm, humid, lying in the southern parts of the inhabited lands, extended to the South as in the body of man the heart extends to the left', for 'the Egyptians consider the East as

4. *La Kabbale juive*, 1, p. 509.

5. *Ibid.*, 2, p. 116.

6. [Needless to say, Guénon referred here to the Catholic liturgy as it existed prior to the modernist corruptions following in the wake of Vatican II. Tr.]

7. *Ibid*, 1, p. 501

8. See our article on 'Thunderbolts', [27 below].

9. *Kemi*, in Egyptian, signifies 'blackland', a designation also found among other peoples; the word *alchemy* comes from this word (*al* being only the article in Arabic), which originally designated the Hermetic science, i.e., the sacerdotal science of Egypt.

10. *Isis et Osiris*, 33, translation of Mario Meunier, p. 116.

the face of the world, the North being the right and the South as the left'.[11] These are rather superficial correspondences and the real reason must be quite different, as the same comparison with the heart has likewise been applied to every land held to be sacred and 'central' in the spiritual sense, whatever its geographic situation. Moreover, according to Plutarch himself, the heart which represented Egypt at the same time represented Heaven: 'The Egyptians', he said, 'represent Heaven, which cannot grow old as it is eternal, by a heart placed on a brazier, the flame of which maintains the vital warmth'.[12] Thus, while the heart is itself represented by a vase which is not other than that which the legends of the Western Middle Ages designated as the 'Holy Grail', it is also simultaneously the hieroglyph of Egypt and of Heaven.

The conclusion to be drawn from these considerations is that there are as many particular 'Holy Lands' as there are regular traditional forms, since they represent the spiritual centres which correspond respectively to these different forms. But if the same symbolism applies uniformly to all these 'Holy Lands', it is because all these spiritual centres have an analogous constitution, often even in precise details, inasmuch as they are all images of one single supreme centre, which alone is the veritable 'Centre of the World', but the attributes of which they apply to themselves in virtue of participating in its nature by a direct communication, wherein lies their traditional orthodoxy,[13] and in virtue of actually representing that Centre in a more or less outward way for particular times and places. In other words, there exists a 'Holy Land' *par excellence*, prototype of all the others, seat of the Primordial

11. *Ibid.*, 32, p. 112. In India it is, on the contrary, the South that is designated as the 'right side' (*dakshina*); but notwithstanding the appearances, this amounts to the same thing, for one must understand thereby the side that is on one's right when one turns towards the East; and it is easy to represent the left side of the world as extending towards the right of the onlooker, and inversely, just as this occurs for two persons facing one another.

12. *Ibid.*, 10, p. 49. It will be noted that this symbol, with the meaning given it here, seems to admit of a comparison with the phœnix.

13. [Very important in this connection is Guénon's remark below, in note 20, that 'in all traditions places essentially symbolise states'. In this connection he has made it clear that the Supreme Centre, which represents the Primordial Tradition, is a 'symbol of the Edenic state'; and all traditions teach that this state remains accessible to man, as a spiritual possibility, throughout the temporal cycle. It could also be said that a religion's maintenance of 'direct communication' with this state, that is, the fact that it continues to guide its adherents to or towards that state, is both a condition and a guarantee of its 'traditional orthodoxy'. But as regards what was spatially the Supreme Centre at the outset of the cycle, there would be no reason for it to continue to remain accessible, since whatever may have been its authoritative and administrative function in the earliest times, each of the religions known to history is, almost by definition, totally independent of any earthly centre outside its own domain, which means, amongst other things, since its orthodoxy is conferred on it directly from Heaven, that it could not, for this purpose, stand in need of any less exalted communication. As to the latest of the religions, in the years during which I knew Guénon, 1939–51, that is, the last twelve years of his life, he would certainly have insisted that Islam derived its orthodoxy directly from the contact of the Archangel Gabriel with the Prophet, maintained throughout his mission, without any question of an intermediary between the two. Moreover, the article which forms this chapter was written over 20 years before Guénon's death. Once again, therefore, the impossibility of author's revisions is to be regretted. Ed.]

Tradition from which all the other particular traditions are derived by adaptation to such and such particular conditions which are those of a people or of an epoch. This 'Holy Land' *par excellence* is the 'supreme country', following the sense of the Sanskrit term *Paradesha*, from which the Chaldeans have made *Pardes* and the Westerners *Paradise*. It is in fact the 'terrestrial Paradise' which is indeed the point of departure of every tradition, having in its centre the one wellspring from which flow the four rivers towards the four cardinal points,[14] and which is also the 'sojourn of immortality' as can easily be seen by referring to the first chapters of *Genesis*.[15]

We cannot think of returning here to all the questions which concern the Supreme Centre, and which we have already treated very fully elsewhere: its conservation, in a more or less hidden way according to the period, from the beginning to the end of the cycle, that is, from the 'terrestrial Paradise' to the 'celestial Jerusalem' which represent its two extreme phases; the multiple names by which it is designated, such as *Tula, Luz, Salem, Agartha*;[16] the different symbols which represent it, such as the mountain, the cavern, the island and still many others, immediately connected for the most part with the symbolism of the 'Pole' or of the 'World Axis'. To these figurations, we could join those which make of it a city, a citadel, a temple or a palace, according to the particular aspect under which it is envisaged; and in this context it is relevant to mention not only the Temple of Solomon which relates more directly to our subject, but also the triple precinct of which we have recently spoken as representing the initiatic hierarchy of certain traditional centres,[17] as well as the mysterious labyrinth which, under a more complex form, pertains to a similar conception, with the difference that what is especially stressed here is the idea of an approach or advance towards the hidden centre.[18]

14. This source is identical to the 'fountain of instruction', to which we have alluded, even here [in *Le Voile d'Isis*], more than once.

15. This is why the 'fountain of instruction' is at the same time the 'fountain of youth' (*fons juventutis*), because whoever drinks of it is emancipated from the temporal condition. It is, moreover, located at the foot of the 'Tree of Life' (see our study on 'Le langage secret de Dante et des "Fidèles d'Amour"' in *Le Voile d'Isis*, February 1929) and its waters are obviously identical with the 'elixir of long life' of the Hermetists (the idea of 'Longevity' having here the same meaning as in the Oriental traditions) or to the 'draught of immortality', which is mentioned in all traditions, under various names.

16. [On *Agartha*, see Marco Pallis, '*Le Roi du Monde* et le problème des sources d'Ossendowski' in *René Guénon*, Les Dossiers H, L'Age d'Homme, Lausanne, 1984. See also the review, by Whitall N. Perry, of *The Lord of the World* in *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Summer–Autumn, 1983. Tr.]

17. In the last chapter we pointed out the relation of this figure in its two forms, circular and square, with the symbolism of the terrestrial Paradise and the celestial Jerusalem.

18. The Cretan labyrinth was the palace of *Minos*, a name identical with *Manu*, therefore designating the primordial legislator. On the other hand, one can understand, from what is said here, the reason why following the labyrinth traced on the pavement of certain churches in the Middle Ages was regarded as replacing the pilgrimage to the Holy Land for those unable to accomplish this journey. It must be remembered that the pilgrimage is precisely one of the figures representing initiation, so that 'pilgrimage to the Holy Land' is, in an esoteric sense, the same thing as the 'search for the lost Word' or the 'quest for the Holy Grail'.

We must now add that the symbolism of the 'Holy Land' has a double meaning: whether it may relate to the supreme Centre or to a subordinate centre, it represents not only that centre itself but also, by an association which is entirely natural, the tradition which emanates from it and which is there preserved, that is, in the first case, the Primordial Tradition, and in the second, a particular traditional form.[19] This double meaning is likewise to be found, and in a particularly clear way, in the symbolism of the Holy Grail which is at once a vase (*grasale*) and a book (*gradale* or *graduale*); this latter aspect manifestly designates the tradition while the other concerns more directly the state corresponding to the actual possession of this tradition, that is, the 'edenic state' if it is the Primordial Tradition that is in question; and he who has attained to this state is thereby reintegrated into *Pardes* in such a way that his abode is henceforth in the 'Centre of the World'.[20]

It is not without a motive that we bring together these two symbolisms, for their close resemblance shows that when one speaks of the 'knighthood of the Holy Grail' or of the 'guardians of the Holy Land', what must be understood by the two expressions is exactly the same thing. It remains for us to explain, as far as possible, exactly what is the function of these 'guardians', a function which belonged in particular to the Templars.[21]

In order to understand clearly what is involved, we must distinguish between the custodians of the tradition whose function is to preserve and transmit it, and those who are only recipients, in one degree or another, of a communication of the tradition and, we might say, a participation in it.

The first, trustees and dispensers of the doctrine, remain at the source which is strictly the centre itself. From there, the doctrine is communicated and distributed hierarchically to the different initiatic degrees, according to the streams represented by the rivers of *Pardes*, or, to use the figuration which was the theme of the last chapter, by the channels which run from the inside towards the outside, linking together the successive precincts which correspond to the different degrees.

Not all, therefore, of those who participate in the tradition have reached the same degree, nor do they fulfil the same function; it is necessary even to make a distinction between these last two things which, though corresponding in a

19. Analogically and from the cosmogonic point of view, the 'Centre of the World' is the original point at which is uttered the creative Word; and it is also that Word itself.

20. In this connection it is important to recall that in all traditions places essentially symbolise states. On the other hand, there is an evident kinship between the symbolism of the vase and cup and that of the fountain mentioned above. We have also seen that, with the Egyptians, the vase was the hieroglyph of the heart, the vital centre of the being. We recall, finally, what we have said on other occasions on the subject of wine as substitute for the Vedic *soma* and as symbol of hidden doctrine. In all this, under one form or another, it is always a question of the 'draught of immortality' and of the restoration of the 'primordial state'.

21. St Yves d'Alveydre, to designate the 'guardians' of the supreme Centre, uses the expression 'Templars of Agartha'. The considerations which we set forth here will show the justice of this term, the full significance of which may have escaped the author himself.

general way, are not, strictly speaking, inseparable. For it can happen that a man may be intellectually qualified to attain to the highest degrees but may not thereby be apt to fulfill all the functions in the initiatic organisation. Here it is only the functions which we have to consider; and from this point of view we will say that the 'guardians' remain at the boundary of the spiritual centre, taken in its widest sense, or at the last precinct, by which the centre is both separated from the 'outer world' and placed in relationship with it. Consequently, these 'guardians' have a double function: on the one hand, they are indeed the defenders of the 'Holy Land' in the sense that they bar from access to it all who lack the requisite qualifications to enter, and they constitute what we have called its 'outer covering', that is, they conceal it from the eyes of the profane. On the other hand, they nevertheless assure certain regular relations with the outside, as we shall explain in what follows.

It is obvious that to act as defender is, to speak the language of Hinduism, a function of the Kshatriya; and all 'chivalric' initiation is in fact essentially adapted to the nature of men pertaining to the warrior caste, that is, the Kshatriyas. Hence the special characteristics of this initiation, the particular symbolism which it uses, and the intervention of an affective element very explicitly designated by the term 'Love'. As we have already explained this at some length, we need not dwell on it here.[22] But in the case of the Templars, there is something more to be considered: even though their initiation was essentially 'chivalric', as suited their nature and function, they had two sides to their character, being both military and religious; and it had to be so if they were, as we have many reasons to think, among the 'guardians' of the supreme Centre, in which spiritual authority and temporal power are reunited in their common principle, and which as it were stamps the recognisable sign or mark of this reunion on all that is directly connected with it. In the Western world, where the spiritual takes a specifically religious form, the true 'guardians of the Holy Land', insofar as they had any 'official' existence, had to be knights, but knights who were monks at the same time, and in fact that indeed is what the Templars were.

This brings us directly to the second function of the 'guardians' of the supreme Centre, a function which, as we said just now, consists in ensuring certain outward relationships and above all in maintaining the bond between the Primordial Tradition and the secondary derived traditions. That this may be so, it is necessary that for each traditional form there should be one or more organisations to all appearances within the said form, but composed of men conscious of what lies beyond all forms, that is, of the one doctrine which is the source and essence of all the others and which is not other than the Primordial Tradition.

In the world of the Judeo-Christian tradition it would be natural enough for such an organisation to take as symbol the Temple of Solomon. This temple,

22. See 'Le langage secret de Dante et des "Fidèles d'Amour"', in *Le Voile d'Isis*, February 1929.

moreover, having long since ceased to exist materially, could thus have only an altogether ideal signification, as being, like every subordinate spiritual centre, an image of the supreme Centre. The very etymology of Jerusalem indicates clearly enough that it is only a visible image of the mysterious *Salem* of Melchizedek. If the Templars were indeed what we believe them to have been, in order to fulfil their allotted function concerning the specific tradition, that of the West, they would have to remain attached outwardly to the form of this tradition; but at the same time they would need to have an inner consciousness of real doctrinal unity so as to be capable of communicating with the representatives of other traditions.[23] It is this that explains their relations with certain Oriental organisations and especially, as is natural, with those that elsewhere played a part similar to their own.

These considerations make it clear, on the other hand, why the destruction of the Order of the Temple should have entailed for the West the rupture of regular relations with the 'Centre of the World'; and it is precisely from the fourteenth century that the deviation inevitably resulting from this rupture must be dated, a deviation which has gone on gradually becoming more and more accentuated down to our own time.

This is not to say, however, that all ties were broken with a single blow; it was possible to maintain some degree of relations for quite some time, but only in a hidden way, and by the intermediary of organisations such as the *Fede Santa* or the *Fedeli d'Amore* or the *Massenie du Saint-Graal* and doubtless many others as well, all inheritors of the spirit of the Order of the Temple, and for the most part attached to it by a more or less direct filiation. Those who kept that spirit alive and who inspired these organisations without ever forming themselves into any definite group were those who are called Rosicrucians[24]—an essentially symbolic name. But the day came when these Rosicrucians themselves had to leave the West in which conditions had become such that their action could no longer be exercised there, and it is said that they retired into Asia, reabsorbed as it were, towards the supreme Centre of which they were an emanation. For the Western world there is no longer a 'Holy Land' to guard, as the way which leads to it is henceforth entirely lost. How much longer will this situation endure? That is a question which it is not for us to answer. Apart from the fact that we do not wish to hazard any prediction, the solution depends only on the West itself; for it is in returning to normal conditions and in recovering the spirit of its own tradition–if it still has in it this possibility—that the West may see open before it the way that leads to the 'Centre of the World'.

23. This is related to what has been called, symbolically, 'the gift of tongues'. On this subject, we refer the reader to our article contained in the special issue of *Le Voile d'Isis* devoted to the Rosicrucians [included in *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, ch. 37.]

24. [Obviously those to whom Guénon refers here have nothing in common with certain contemporary occultist groups that have appropriated this name and who advertise their 'esoterism' in popular journals. Tr.]

14 § The Land of the Sun

AMONG the localities, often difficult to identify, which play a part in the legend of the Holy Grail, certain people attach a very special importance to Glastonbury which they consider to be the place where Joseph of Arimathea settled after his arrival in Britain and where, as we shall see, they are inclined to locate many other things. Doubtless, there are more or less questionable assimilations in all this, and some of them imply real confusions; but nevertheless it may be that there are, even in the confusions themselves, one or two justifications which are not without interest from the point of view of 'sacred geography' and of the successive locations of certain traditional centres. This appears to be implicit in the remarkable discoveries described in an anonymous work published recently,[1] some points of which may perhaps call for reservations (for example, the interpretation of place names which are probably of quite recent origin); but the essential part, with the supporting maps, could not be easily dismissed as pure fantasy. At a very remote prehistoric time, Glastonbury and its immediate Somerset surroundings would seem to have constituted an immense 'stellar temple', defined by tracings on the ground of giant figures representing the constellations arranged in a circular pattern which is like an image of the celestial vault projected onto the surface of the earth. A whole combination was there of works which call to mind those of the mound-builders of North America; the natural disposition of rivers and hills could have suggested this plan, which would indicate that the site was not arbitrarily chosen but was selected rather in virtue of a certain 'predetermination'. It is none the less true that in order to complete and perfect the design, 'an art founded on the principles of Geometry'[2] was necessary. If these figures have been preserved in such a way as to be still recognisable today, it is presumably because the monks of Glastonbury, up to the time of the Reformation, carefully maintained them; and this implies that they must have preserved the knowledge of the tradition inherited from their distant predecessors, the Druids, and no doubt still others before them; for if the deductions drawn from the represented positions of the constellations are exact, the origin of these figures dates back almost three thousand years before the Christian era.[3]

In its totality, the circular figure in question is an immense Zodiac which, so

1. *A Guide to Glastonbury's Temple of the Stars, its giant effigies described from air views, maps and from 'The High History of the Holy Grail'* (John M Watkins, London).

2. This expression is clearly intended to make clear that the tradition from which this art derived was continued in what later became the Masonic tradition.

3. It would also seem, according to various indications, that the Templars may have had a certain part in this conservation, which would be in conformity with their supposed connection with the 'Knights of the Round Table' and with the function which is attributed to them as 'guardians of the Grail'. It is to be noted, moreover, that the establishments of the Templars often seem to have been situated in the neighborhoods of megalithic monuments and other prehistoric remains, which may well be more than a simple coincidence.

the author maintains, is the prototype of the Round Table; and in fact, this Table, around which sit twelve principal personages, is well and truly bound up with a representation of the zodiacal cycle. But this does not mean that these personages are nothing other than the constellations, which would be a much too naturalistic interpretation. For the truth is that the constellations themselves are only symbols; and it is also worth recalling that this zodiacal constitution is to be found quite generally in spiritual centres corresponding to diverse traditional forms.[4] Thus, it seems to us very doubtful that all the legends concerning the 'Knights of the Round Table' and the 'quest of the Holy Grail' could be nothing more than a 'dramatised' description of the stellar effigies of Glastonbury and of the topography of that region. But that they correspond to these figures is all the less to be doubted in that this correspondence is quite in conformity with the general laws of symbolism. Nor is it even surprising that this correspondence should be so precise as to be verifiable even in the secondary details of the legend, which, moreover, we do not propose to examine here.

The Zodiac of Glastonbury has several characteristics which, from our point of view, can be considered as marks of its authenticity. First of all, it seems that the sign of the Scales [*Libra*], is missing. Now, as we have explained elsewhere,[5] the celestial Scales were not always a sign of the Zodiac: at first they were polar, the name having been applied primitively to the Great Bear, or to the Great Bear and Little Bear together—constellations to whose symbolism, by a remarkable coincidence, the name of Arthur is directly attached. It may be admitted that the Glastonbury tracing, at the centre of which the Pole is marked by a serpent's head (which is clearly to be referred back to the 'celestial Dragon'),[6] must be assigned to a period that preceded the transfer of the Scales into the Zodiac. On the other hand, and this is a particularly important consideration, the symbol of the polar Scales is related to the name *Tula*, given originally to the Hyperborean centre of the Primordial Tradition, that centre of which the 'stellar temple' in question here was doubtless one of those images that were constituted, in the course of time, as seats of spiritual power emanating or derived more or less directly from this same tradition.[7]

On another occasion,[8] in connection with the use of the word 'Syrian' to denote the 'Adamic' language, we mentioned primeval Syria, the name of

4. See *The Lord of the World*, ch. 5.

5. *Ibid*, ch. 10

6. Cf., the *Sepher Ietsirah*: 'The Dragon is in the middle of the heaven as a king on his throne'. The 'Wisdom of the Serpent', to which the author alludes in this connection, could, in a certain sense, be identified with the seven polar *Rishis*. It is curious, also, to note that with the Celts the dragon is the symbol of the chief and that Arthur is the son of Uther Pendragon.

7. This makes clear certain relationships noted by the author between the symbolism of the Pole and that of the 'earthly Paradise', in particular as regards the presence of the tree and the serpent. In all this, it is always a question of the representation of the primordial centre; and the 'three points of the triangle' are also related to this symbolism.

8. See our study on 'The Science of Letters' [ch. 8 above].

which means literally 'the land of the Sun'. Homer speaks of it as an island situated 'beyond Ortygia', which precludes its identification with anything other than *Thule* or the Hyperborean *Tula*. 'There' he says, 'are the revolutions of the Sun', an enigmatic expression which naturally can be related to the 'circumpolarity' of these revolutions, but which, at the same time, can also be an allusion to a tracing of the zodiacal cycle on the land itself—which would explain why such a design had been reproduced in a region destined to be an image of this centre. We touch here upon the explanation of those confusions mentioned at the outset, for they may well have resulted, as it were in the normal course of things, from treating the image of the centre as if it were the original centre itself; and in particular there would seem to be a confusion of this very kind in the identification of Glastonbury with the isle of Avalon.[9] Such an identification is indeed incompatible with the fact that this island is always considered as an inaccessible place; and it also contradicts the much more plausible opinion that sees, in the same region of Somerset, the 'Kingdom of Logres' which is, in fact, said to be situated in Great Britain. This 'Kingdom of Logres', which would have been regarded as a sacred territory, may well have taken its name from the Celtic Lug, which evokes both the idea of 'Word' and that of 'Light'. As to the name *Avalon*, it is clearly identical with that of *Ablun* or *Belen*, that is, of the Celtic and Hyperborean Apollo,[10] so that the Isle of Avalon is yet another designation of the 'solar land', which at a certain time was transported symbolically from the North to the West, in correspondence with one of the chief changes that have occurred in the different traditional forms in the course of our *Mahā-yuga*.[11]

These considerations lead us to others that are perhaps still more strange: an idea that seems at first inexplicable is that of attributing the origin of the Glastonbury Zodiac to the Phoenicians. It is true that we are in the habit of giving them the credit for many more or less hypothetical things, but the very affirmation of their existence at such a remote time appears to us still more questionable. None the less, the Phoenicians inhabited the 'historical' Syria. Could the name of the people have undergone the same transfer as that of the country itself? What makes us think so is its connection with

9. Glastonbury has also been identified with the 'island of glass' mentioned in parts of the legend of the Grail. Here also there is probably a confusion between it and some more hidden centre, or one that is more remote in space and in time, though it is unlikely that the 'island of glass' could be a name of the primordial centre itself.

10. It is known that in ancient times Mont Saint-Michel was named Tombelaine, that is to say, *Tumulus* or mount of *Belen* (and not the 'tomb of Helen' according to an entirely modern and fanciful interpretation). The substitution of the name of the solar archangel for that of *Belen* changes nothing as to the meaning; and curiously enough, there is a St Michael's Hill in the region that corresponds to the ancient 'Kingdom of Logres'.

11. This change in position, like that of the *sapta-riksha* of the Great Bear to the Pleiads, corresponds especially to a change in the starting point of the year, which was at first solstitial and then equinoctial. The meaning of 'apple' attached to the name *Avalon* in the Celtic languages, no doubt secondarily, is not in any way in opposition with what we have said, for it is then a question of the golden apples of the Garden of Hesperides, that is, the solar fruits of the World Tree.

the symbolism of the Phoenix. In fact, according to Josephus, the capital of the primaeval Syria was Heliopolis, the 'City of the Sun', the name of which was later given to the Egyptian city of On; and it is to the first Heliopolis, not to that of Egypt, that the cyclical symbolism of the Phoenix and its rebirths must really be related. According to Diodorus of Sicily, one of the sons of *Helios* or of the sun, *Actis* by name, founded the city of Heliopolis; and it happens that this name *Actis* exists as a place name in the neighborhood of Glastonbury, in conditions which place it in precise relation with the Phoenix, into which according to other allusions this 'prince of Heliopolis' had himself been transformed. Naturally, the author, misled by the multiple and successive applications of the same names, believed that it was the Egyptian Heliopolis that was involved here, just as he believed that he could speak literally of the historical Phoenicians, which is all the more excusable in that the ancients of classical times had already made mistakes of the same sort often enough. Only the knowledge of the real Hyperborean origin of these traditions, which he seems not to suspect, makes it possible to re-establish the real meaning of all these designations.

In the Zodiac of Glastonbury, the sign of Aquarius or the Water-bearer is represented in a rather unexpected way by a bird in which the author rightly thinks that he recognises the Phoenix; this bird carries an object which is none other than the 'cup of immortality', the Grail itself, and the comparison which is made with the Hindu *Garuda* is certainly quite right.[12] On the other hand, according to an Arab tradition, the *Rukh* or Phoenix never comes to rest on the earth at any point other than on the mountain *Qāf*, which is the polar mountain; and in the Hindu and Persian traditions it is from this same 'polar mountain' (also designated by other names) that *soma*[13] comes, *soma* which is identical with *amrita* or 'ambrosia', the draught or food of immortality.[14]

There is also the figure of another bird which is more difficult to interpret exactly, and which perhaps takes the place of the sign of the Scales, though in any case its position is nearer to the Pole than to the Zodiac, as one of its wings even corresponds to the stars of the Great Bear which, after what has already been said, can only confirm this suspicion. As to the nature of this bird, there are two hypotheses: that it is a dove, which in fact could have some relationship with the symbolism of the Grail; and that it is a goose, or rather a swan brooding over the World Egg, that is, an equivalent of the Hindu *Hamsa*. This last interpretation is in fact much to be preferred, the symbol of the swan being closely linked to the Hyperborean Apollo; and it becomes even more preferable in the context of our theme, in that according to the Greeks *Kyknos* was the son of Apollo and of *Hyria*, that is,

12. See 'The Language of the Birds' [19 above]. The sign of the Water-bearer or Aquarius is commonly represented by Ganymede whose relation with *ambrosia* on the one hand and the eagle of Zeus on the other is well known; Zeus' eagle is itself identical with *Garuda*.

13. [Or *haoma* as commonly rendered from the ancient Persian tradition. Tr.]

14. See *The Lord of the World*, ch. 5 and 6.

of the Sun and of the 'land of the Sun'; for *Hyria* is just another form of *Syria*, so that it is always the 'sacred isle' that is in question, and it would be somewhat surprising if the swan did not figure in its representation.[15]

Many other points of interest could be dwelt on, as for example the name 'Somerset' with that of the 'country of the Cimmerians' and with different names of peoples, the likeness of which very probably indicates not so much ethnic kinship as a community of tradition. But that would lead us too far afield; and we have said enough to indicate the extent of a field of research that still remains almost completely unexplored, and enough also to give some idea of the conclusions that might be drawn about the bonds between different traditions and their filiation from the Primordial Tradition.

15 § The Zodiac and the Cardinal Points

In a book on castes, A. M. Hocart calls attention to the fact that 'in the organisation of the city, the four groups are located at the different cardinal points inside the quadrangular or circular precinct'. This allocation is not peculiar to India; many examples of it are to be found among the most diverse peoples; and most often each cardinal point is placed in correspondence with one of the elements and one of the seasons, as well as with an emblematic colour of the caste there located.[1] In India, the Brahmins occupied the North, the Kshatriyas the East, Vaisyas the South, and Shūdras the West. There was in this way a division into 'quarters' in the strict sense of the term which originally and obviously designated a quarter, that is, one fourth of a city, even though in modern usage this signification seems to have been forgotten more or less completely. It goes without saying that this repartition is closely related to the more general question of orientation which, as is well known, played an important part in all the ancient traditional civilisations, for a city as a whole as well as for each particular edifice.

Hocart is at a loss, however, to explain the proper localisation of each of the four castes.[2] His confusion ultimately stems from nothing but his error of considering the royal caste, the Kshatriyas, as the highest. Proceeding then

15. The bringing together of the two figures of *Hamsa* and *Garuda* is also quite normal, for they are sometimes even combined in the figure of a single bird, from which the two-headed heraldic eagle seems to have originated even though this eagle takes the form of a double *Garuda*; a *Hamsa-Garuda* would naturally have the heads of a swan and of an eagle.

1. *Les Castes*, pp. 46 & 49. [English translation, *Caste, A Comparative Study*, London, 1950.]
2. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

from the East, he cannot find any regular order of succession and, in particular, the situation of the Brahmins at the North becomes completely unintelligible. On the contrary, there is no difficulty if we keep to the normal order, that is, if we begin with the caste which really is the highest, the Brahmins. We must then proceed from the North, and turning in the direction of the *pradakshina*,[3] we find the four castes following one another in a perfectly regular order. It remains only to understand more thoroughly the symbolic reasons for this repartition according to the cardinal points.

These reasons are based essentially on the fact that the traditional plan of the city is an image of the Zodiac; and this brings us straight back to the correspondence of the cardinal points with the seasons: as we have explained elsewhere, the winter solstice corresponds to the North, the vernal equinox to the East, the summer solstice to the South, and the autumnal equinox to the West. In the division into 'quarters', each of these must naturally correspond to the group formed by three of the twelve zodiacal signs: one of the solstitial or equinoctial signs, which can be called 'cardinal' signs, and the two signs adjacent to it. There will be three signs included, therefore, in each quadrant if the form of the precinct is circular, or on each side if it is quadrangular. This last form, moreover, is particularly appropriate to a city because it expresses an idea of stability which is appropriate to a fixed and permanent establishment, and also because what is involved is not the celestial Zodiac itself but only an image and a kind of terrestrial projection of it. No doubt it was for analogous reasons that the ancient astrologers drew their horoscopes in a square form in which each side was likewise occupied by three zodiacal signs;[4] we will come again to this disposition in what follows.

It will now be clear that the distribution of the castes in the city follows exactly the march of the annual cycle, which normally begins at the winter solstice. It is true that certain traditions make the year begin at another solstitial or equinoctial point, but these cases involve traditional forms with a more particular relationship to certain secondary cyclical periods. The question does not arise in the Hindu tradition which represents the most direct continuation of the Primordial Tradition and which, moreover, especially insists on the division of the annual cycle into its two ascending and descending halves, opening respectively the two solstitial 'gates' of winter and summer which, in fact, is the strictly fundamental point of view in this respect. On the other hand, the North, which is considered as the uppermost point (*uttara*) and which thus marks the starting point of the tradition, pertains quite naturally to the Brahmins. The Kshatriyas are placed at the point which comes next in the cyclical correspondence, that is, at the East, the direction of the rising sun. By comparing these two positions it can be quite legitimately inferred that, while the character of the priesthood is 'polar', that of the royalty is 'solar', which many other symbolic considerations would confirm still further; and perhaps

3. [The ritual circumambulation of a sacred object in which one keeps the object on one's right in a 'clockwise' movement. Tr.]

4. [Cf., *figure* 9, p. 59].

this solar character is not unrelated to the fact that the *Avatāras* of historical times have come from the Kshatriya caste. The Vaisyas, coming in third place, take their place at the South and mark the end of the succession of the 'twice-born' castes; there remains for the Shūdras only the West, which is everywhere regarded as the direction of darkness.

All this is perfectly logical, therefore, on the one condition that there be no mistake as to the point of departure; and in order to justify more thoroughly what has been said about the 'zodiacal' nature of the traditional layout of cities, we will now cite several facts which show that if their division responds mainly to the quaternary division of the cycle, there are cases where a twelvefold subdivision was clearly indicated. We have an example of this in the foundation of cities according to the rite that the Romans received from the Etruscans. The orientation was marked by two roads at right angles, the *cardo* running from South to North, and the *decumanus* running from West to East. At the extremities of these two roads were the gates of the city which thus were situated exactly at the four cardinal points. The city was accordingly divided into four quarters which, none the less, in this case did not correspond precisely to the four cardinal points as in India, but rather to the intermediary points. It goes without saying that it is necessary to take into account the difference of the traditional forms, which require diverse adaptations, but the principle of the division is no less the same. Moreover, and this is the point that must be emphasized here, there was superimposed on this division into quarters, a division into 'tribes', that is, according to the etymological sense of the word, a ternary division. Each of the three 'tribes' comprised four *curias* distributed in the four quarters so that there was altogether a twelvefold division.

Another example is that of the Hebrews, which Hocart himself cites, though he does not seem to take note of the importance of the number twelve. 'The Hebrews', he says,[5] were familiar with social division into four quarters; their twelve territorial tribes were divided into four groups of three tribes, one of each being a principal tribe. Judah camped to the East, Ruben to the South, Ephraim to the West, and Dan to the North. The Levites formed an inner circle around the Tabernacle, and were also divided into four groups placed at the four cardinal points, the chief branch being to the East'.[6] Actually there is no question here of the organisation of a city but at first that of a camp, and later the allocation of the territory of a whole country; but obviously this makes no difference at all from our present standpoint. The difficulty, in establishing an exact comparison with what exists elsewhere, derives from the apparent absence of definite social functions assigned to each of the tribes, a fact which precludes their being assimilated to castes in the strict sense. Nevertheless, on at least one point there is a very clear similarity with the disposition adopted in India, for the royal tribe, that of Judah, also was placed to the East. On the other hand, there was also a remarkable difference: the sacerdotal tribe, that of Levi,

5. *Les Castes*, p. 127. 6. *Numbers* 2 and 3.

was not counted among the twelve, did not have a place on the sides of the quadrilateral, and in consequence no territory could be assigned to it for its own. Its situation in the inner part of the camp can be explained by the fact that it was expressly attached to the service of a single sanctuary which at first was the Tabernacle, the normal position of which was at the centre. However that may be, all that concerns us in the present instance is the fact that the twelve tribes were distributed by threes on the four sides of a quadrilateral facing towards the four cardinal points; and it is generally known that there was, in fact, a symbolic correspondence between the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve signs of the Zodiac, which leaves no doubt as to the nature and significance of the distribution in question. We will simply add that the chief tribe on each side manifestly corresponds to one of the four 'cardinal' signs, the two others corresponding to the two adjacent signs.

If reference is now made to the apocalyptic description of the 'celestial Jerusalem', is is easy to see that its plan exactly reproduces that of the camp of the Hebrews of which we have just spoken; and at the same time, this plan is also identical to the square horoscope mentioned above. The city, which is in fact built in a square, has twelve gates on which are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of Israel; and these gates are distributed in the same way on the four sides: 'three gates to the East, three to the North, three to the South, and three to the West'. It is obvious that these twelve gates correspond moreover to the twelve zodiacal signs, the four chief gates, that is, those in the middle of each of the four sides, corresponding to the solstitial and equinoctial signs; and the twelve aspects of the Sun relate to each of the signs, that is, to the twelve *Ādityas* of the Hindu tradition, appearing under the form of the twelve fruits of the Tree of Life which, placed at the centre of the city, 'gives its fruits each month', that is, precisely according to the successive positions of the Sun in the Zodiac in the course of the annual cycle. This city, 'descending from heaven to earth', thus represents clearly enough, at least in one of its significations, the projection of the celestial 'archetype' into the constitution of the terrestrial city; and no doubt enough has already been said to show that this 'archetype' is symbolised essentially by the Zodiac.

16 § The *Tetraktys* and the Square of Four

We have often had occasion[1] to allude to the Pythagorean *Tetraktys* with its numerical formula $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$, showing the relationship that unites

1. [*The Symbolism of the Cross*, final note of ch. 6.]

the number ten directly with the number four. The quite exceptional importance which the Pythagoreans attached to the *Tetraktys* is well known and it can be measured especially by the fact that they swore by the 'Holy *Tetraktys*'. It is no doubt less well known that they also had another formula for their oaths, namely 'by the square of four'; between the two formulas there is an obvious relationship; for the number four is their common base. This implies, among other things, that the Pythagorean doctrine had to be put forward in a mode that was more 'cosmological' than purely metaphysical, nor is that an exceptional case when Western traditions are concerned, for we have already had cause to make an analogous remark about Hermetism. The reason for this deduction, which may seem strange at first to those who are unaccustomed to the use of numerical symbolism, is that the quaternary is always and everywhere considered as the number of universal manifestation. In this respect, it therefore marks the very starting point of cosmology, while the numbers that precede it, one, two and three, are strictly related to ontology. The particular emphasis on the quaternary *ipso facto* corresponds to the cosmological perspective itself.

At the beginning of the *Rasā'il Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā'*, the four terms of the fundamental quaternary are enumerated as follows: 1 – the Principle, which is designated as *al-Bāri'*, the Creator (which indicates that it is not the supreme Principle, but only Being, inasmuch as it is the first principle of manifestation which is, in fact, metaphysical Unity); 2 – the universal Spirit; 3 – the universal Soul; and 4 – the primordial *Hyle*. We will not develop just now the different points of view from which these terms can be understood; they could be said, for example, to correspond to the four 'worlds' of the Hebrew Kabbala, which also have their exact equivalents in Islamic esoterism. What concerns us for the moment is that the quaternary thus constituted is held to be presupposed by manifestation, in the sense that the presence of all its terms is necessary for the complete development of the possibilities which manifestation comprises; and this moreover is said to be why, in the order of manifested things, the mark of the quaternary, we might say its 'signature', is always especially noticeable—whence, for example, the four elements (Ether not being counted here, for it is a question only of the 'differentiated' elements), the four cardinal points (or the four regions of space which correspond to them, with the four 'pillars' of the world), the four phases into which each cycle is naturally divided (the ages of human life, the seasons in the yearly cycle, the lunar phases in the monthly cycle, etc), and so on. Any number of applications of the quaternary are there, all interconnected moreover by rigorous analogical correspondences, for basically they are just so many more or less specialised aspects of one same general 'schema' of manifestation.

This 'schema', in its geometric form, is one of the most widespread symbols, one of those which are truly common to all traditions: it is the circle divided into four equal parts by a cross formed from two diameters at right angles; and it can be noted at once that this figure expresses precisely the

relationship between the quaternary and the denary, as does the numerical formula we recalled at the beginning. In fact the quaternary is represented geometrically in its 'static' aspect by the square, but in its 'dynamic' aspect, as here, by the cross; and the cross, when it turns around its own centre, engenders the circumference which, with the centre, represents the denary which itself, as we have already said, is the complete numerical cycle. This is what is called the 'circling of the square', the geometric representation of what is represented arithmetically by the formula $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$. Inversely, the Hermetic problem of the 'squaring of the circle' (an expression so often misunderstood) is nothing other than what is represented by the fourfold division of the circle implicit from the start by two diameters at right angles. This will be expressed numerically by the same formula, but written inversely: $10 = 1 + 2 + 3 + 4$, to show that all the development of manifestation is thus brought back to the fundamental quaternary.

Let us now return to the relationship between the *Tetraktys* and the square of four: the numbers 10 and 16 have the same rank, namely the fourth, in the two series of triangular numbers and square numbers respectively. The triangular numbers, of course, are those numbers obtained by adding the consecutive whole numbers from unity to each of the successive terms of the series. Unity itself is the first triangular number, as it is also the first square number; for being the principle and the origin of the series of whole numbers it must also be the principle and origin of all the other series that are derived from it. The second triangular number is $1 + 2 = 3$, which shows, moreover, that once unity has produced the binary by its own polarisation, the immediate result is the ternary; and the geometric representation of this is obvious: 1 corresponds to the summit of the triangle, 2 to the extremities of the base, and the triangle itself taken as a whole is naturally the figure of the number 3. If we then consider the three terms of the ternary as having an independent existence, this sum gives the third triangular number: $1 + 2 + 3 = 6$. This senary number, being the double of the ternary, can be said to imply a new ternary which is a reflection of the first, as in the well-known symbol of the 'seal of Solomon'; but this could give rise to other considerations which would be outside our present subject. Continuing the series, the fourth triangular number is: $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$, namely, the *Tetraktys*; and one sees by this, as we have already explained, that the quaternary in a sense contains all the numbers because it contains the denary—whence the formula of the *Tao-te-King* that we have cited elsewhere, 'one has produced two, two has produced three, three has produced all the numbers', which amounts to saying once again that all manifestation is as it were enveloped within the quaternary, or, inversely, that the quaternary constitutes the whole basis of manifestation's integral development.

The *Tetraktys*, as a triangular number, was naturally represented by a symbol which, taken as a whole, was of ternary form, each of its outer sides comprising four elements; and this symbol was composed of ten elements in all, represented by as many points, of which nine were on the perimeter of the

triangle and one at its centre. It will be noted that in this disposition, despite the difference of geometric forms, we have the equivalent of the already explained representation of the denary by the circle, as there also 1 corresponds to the centre and 9 to the circumference. In this connection, let us also note in passing, that it is because 9 and not 10 is the number of the circumference that its division is normally calculated in multiples of 9 (90 degrees for the quadrant and subsequently 360 degrees for the entire circumference) which is moreover directly related to the whole question of 'cyclic numbers'.

The square of four is, geometrically, a square of which the sides contain four elements, like those of the already mentioned triangle. If we consider the sides themselves as measured by the number of these elements, the result is that the sides of the triangle and those of the square will be equal. These two figures can then be united by making the base of the triangle and the upper side of the square coincide as in the figure below (where for greater clarity we have marked the points inside rather than on the sides themselves, so as to be able to count separately those which belong respectively to the triangle and to the square); and the whole thus obtained gives rise to several other considerations that are likewise not without importance. First, if we consider

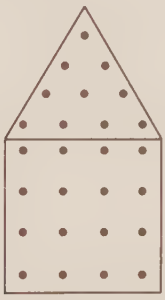


Figure 10

only the triangle and the square as such, this combination is a geometrical figure of the septenary inasmuch as this is the sum of the ternary and the quaternary: $3 + 4 = 7$. More precisely, and according to the actual arrangement of the figure, this septenary is formed from the union of an upper ternary and a lower quaternary, which lends itself to various applications. To limit ourselves to what especially concerns us here, suffice it to say that in the correspondence of triangular and square numbers, the first must be related to a higher domain than the second, from which it can be inferred that in Pythagorean symbolism the *Tetraktys* must have had a function higher than that of the square of four; and in fact, all that is known of that symbolism would seem to indicate that this was indeed the case.

There is another point which is somewhat stranger and which, though it

refers to a different traditional form, certainly cannot be considered as a mere coincidence. The two numbers 10 and 16, contained respectively in the triangle and in the square, have 26 as their sum; and this number 26 is the total numerical value of the letters forming the Hebrew tetragrammaton *yodh, he, vau, he*. What is more 10 is the value of the first letter (*yodh*) and 16 is that of all the three other letters *he, vau* and *he*. This division of the tetragrammaton is perfectly normal and the correspondence of its two parts is again very significant: the *Tetraktys* is thus identified with the *yodh* in the triangle while the rest of the tetragrammaton is inscribed in the square placed beneath it.

On the other hand, the triangle and the square both contain four lines made up of points; and if only to call attention again to the concordances of the different traditional sciences, it is to be noted, though this has no more than a secondary importance, that four lines made up of points are to be found in the diagrams of geomancy, diagrams which by the quaternary combination of 1 and 2 are of the number of $16 = 4^2$; and geomancy, as the name indicates, stands in special relation to the earth which, according to the Far Eastern tradition, is symbolised by the square.[2]

Finally, if we consider the solid forms in three dimensional geometry that correspond to the plane figures in question here, the cube corresponds to the square, and the figure that corresponds to the triangle is the quadrangular pyramid with the upper face of the cube as its base. The whole forms what Masonic symbolism designates as the 'pointed cubic stone' and which, in the Hermetic interpretation, is considered to be a figure of the 'philosopher's stone'. There are yet other observations to make on this last symbol; but since they no longer relate to the *Tetraktys*, it will be preferable to consider them separately.

17 § A Hieroglyph of the Pole

To come back to some of the considerations relating to the figure of the 'pointed cubic stone' which has just been mentioned, let us begin by saying that in ancient documents this figure is completed—rather unexpectedly—by the addition of an axe that seems to be poised in equilibrium on the very summit of the pyramid. This feature has often intrigued specialists in Masonic symbolism, the greater number of whom have been unable to offer any satisfactory explanation whatsoever. It has been suggested, however, that in this context the axe might really be nothing other than a hieroglyph

2. [Cf., *The Great Triad*, ch. 3. See also below, ch. 41, 'The Symbolism of the Dome', and the subsequent chapters.]

of the Hebrew letter *caph*; and in fact it is there that the real solution is to be found. But the comparisons that can be made in this respect are of much more significance if one considers the corresponding Arabic letter *qaf*.

The most general sense attached to the letter in question, either in Hebrew or in Arabic, is that of strength or power (in Arabic, *quwwah*) which may be either of the physical or spiritual order as the case may be; and it is to this meaning, very directly, that the symbolism of a weapon such as the axe corresponds. In the present instance it is obviously a spiritual power that is symbolised, for the axe is placed in direct relationship, not with the cube, but with the pyramid; and this brings to mind what we have already explained elsewhere about the equivalence of the axe and the *vajra* (lightning) which is likewise above all a sign of the spiritual power. Furthermore the axe is placed not just at any point but at the pyramid's summit which is often considered as representing the summit of a spiritual or initiatic hierarchy. This position, therefore, seems to indicate the highest spiritual power active in the world, that is, what all traditions designate as the *Pole*; and in the same connection let us not forget the axial significance of symbolic arms in general and of the axe in particular, which is manifestly in perfect accord with such an interpretation.

What is especially to be noted is that the very name of the letter *qāf* is also, in the Arabic tradition, the name of the sacred or polar Mountain.[1] Its image, the pyramid, thus bears, in this letter or in the axe that stands for it, its own designation as the sacred Mountain, as if to leave no doubt as to the meaning which it is traditionally given. Moreover, if the symbol of the mountain or of the pyramid is referred to the World Axis, its summit, where this letter is placed, becomes identified more precisely with the Pole itself. Now *qāf* is the numeric equivalent of *maqām*, (holy place or station),[2] an equivalence that defines this point as the 'Place', *par excellence*, that is, the single point that remains fixed and invariable in all the revolutions of the world.

The letter *qāf* is moreover the first letter of the Arabic name of the Pole, *Quṭb*, and as such it can stand for the whole word, as initials are often made to do;[3] but there are still other concordances which are no less striking. Thus the seat (the Arabic word is *markaz*, which strictly means

1. Some wish to identify the mountain *Qāf* with the Caucasus (*qafqasiyah*). If this assimilation had to be taken literally in the current geographical sense, it would certainly be erroneous, for it would not accord in any way with what is said of the sacred Mountain, which can be reached 'neither by land nor by sea' (*lā bil-barr wa lā bil-baḥr*). But it must be noted that this name Caucasus was applied long ago to several mountains situated in very different regions, which suggests that originally it may really have been one of the designations of the sacred Mountain, of which the other Caucases would then be so many secondary 'localisations'.

2. *Qāf* = 100 + 1 + 80 = 181; *maqām* = 40 + 100 + 1 + 40 = 181. In Hebrew the same numerical equivalence is found between *qoph* and *maqom*. These words, furthermore, do not differ from the corresponding Arabic words except by the substitution of *vau* for *alif*, of which there are numerous other examples (*nār* and *nur*, *ālam* and *olam*, etc.); the total is then 186.

3. It is thus that the letter *mīm*, for example, may serve to designate the *Mahdī*. Muḥyi d-Dīn ibn al-Arabi sometimes gives it this meaning.

'centre') of the supreme Pole (called *al-Quṭb al-Ghawth*, in order to distinguish him from the seven *Aqṭāb* or secondary and subordinate Poles)[4] is described symbolically as situated between heaven and earth, at a point that is exactly over the *Ka'bah* which, precisely, has the form of a cube and which is itself one of the representations of the 'Centre of the World'. We can thus consider the pyramid, which is invisible because it is of a purely spiritual nature, as rising above this cube which for its part is visible because it relates to the world of the elements, marked by the quaternary number; and at the same time, this cube, on which rests the base of the pyramid or of the hierarchy that it figures with the *Quṭb* at its summit, is also by its form a symbol of perfect stability.

The supreme *Quṭb* is attended by the two *Imāms* of the right and of the left, and the ternary thus formed is represented in the pyramid by the triangularity of each of its faces. On the other hand, the unity and the binary which constitute this ternary correspond to the letters *alif* and *bā*, according to the respective numerical values of these letters. The letter *alif* has the form of a vertical axis; its upper point and the two ends of the horizontal letter *bā* form (according to a schema of which one could find equivalents in various symbols pertaining to other traditions) the three angles of the initiatic triangle, which in fact must be considered as one of the 'signatures' of the Pole.

In connection with this last point, let it be added that the letter *alif* is considered as being especially 'polar' (*quṭbāniyyah*); its name and the word *Quṭb* are numerically equivalent: *alif* = 1 + 30 + 80 = 111; *Quṭb* = 100 + 9 + 2 = 111. This number 111 represents unity expressed in the three worlds, which is a perfectly apt way of describing the very function of the Pole.

18 § The Black Heads

THE name of the Ethiopians signifies, literally, 'burnt faces' (*Aithi-ops*),[1] and consequently 'black faces' is commonly interpreted as designating a people of the black race or at least of a dark complexion. This simplistic explanation, however, seems unsatisfactory as soon as we call to mind that the ancients gave the name of Ethiopia to very diverse countries, even to some for which that explanation would have been in no way appropriate. It is said, for

4. The seven *Aqṭāb* correspond to the 'seven lands' which are also mentioned in other traditions; and these seven terrestrial Poles are a reflection of the seven celestial Poles which preside respectively over the seven planetary Heavens.

1. It is from the same root, *aith*, that the word *aither* derives; and the æther can be considered as a kind of higher fire, that of the 'Empyrean Heaven'.

example, that Atlantis itself was also called Ethiopia, whereas, on the other hand, this name does not seem to have ever been applied to countries inhabited by peoples belonging fully to the black race. There must therefore be something else in all this, and that becomes still more evident as soon as we take note of the existence of similar words or expressions elsewhere—so much so that we feel impelled in the natural course to find out what symbolic meaning such expressions may really have.

In very ancient times the Chinese designated themselves as 'black people' (*li-min*); this expression is found specifically in the *Chou-king* (the reign of the Emperor *Chouen*, 2317–2208 BC). At the beginning of the *Tsing* dynasty, much later (third century BC), the emperor gave to his people another analogous name,[2] that of 'black heads' (*kien-cheou*); and what is again peculiar is that exactly the same expression is found in Chaldea (*nishi salmat kakkadi*) at least a thousand years before this time. Besides, it is to be noted that the characters *kien* and *he*, meaning black, represent fire; and thereby the meaning of this expression 'black heads' is brought back much closer to that of the name of the Ethiopians. The orientalists, who for the most part deliberately ignore all symbolism, wish to explain these terms of 'black people' and 'black heads' as designating 'people with black hair'. Unfortunately, if this characteristic in fact describes the Chinese it could not in any way distinguish them from neighbouring peoples, so that this explanation also would still appear to be fundamentally without significance.

On the other hand, some have thought that the 'black people' were strictly speaking the masses of the people to whom the colour black would have been attributed just as it is in India to the Shūdras, and with the same sense of indistinction and anonymity; but it seems that it is really the entire Chinese people who are thus designated, without any distinction being made between the masses and the élite, and if this was the case, then the symbolism in question could no longer apply. Moreover, given not only the fact that expressions of this kind have been used so widely in space and time as we have shown (and it is even very possible that still more examples exist), but also that the ancient Egyptians, for their part, gave their country the name of *Kemi* or 'blackland', it seems most unlikely that so many diverse peoples would have adopted for themselves or for their countries a designation which would have a pejorative sense. It is not, therefore, to this lower sense of the colour black that we should refer here, but rather to its higher sense, for as we have explained on other occasions, black has a double symbolism, in the same way that anonymity, to which we have just alluded in connection with the mass of the people, has likewise two opposite meanings.[3]

It is known that in its higher sense the colour black symbolises essentially the principial state of non-manifestation, and that it is in this sense that one

2. In China, the attribution of their 'correct designations' to individuals and to things was traditionally one of the functions of the sovereign.

3. On the double sense of anonymity, see *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 9.

must understand, for example, the name of *Krishna*, as opposed to that of *Arjuna* (which signifies 'white')—the one and the other representing respectively the non-manifested and the manifested, the immortal and the mortal, the Self and the self, *Paramatmā* and *jīvātmā*.[4] But how can a symbol of the non-manifested be applicable to a people or to a country? Admittedly the relationship is not obvious at first glance; nevertheless, it does indeed really exist in the cases in question. Furthermore, it cannot be without reason that in several of these cases the colour black is related especially to the 'faces' or 'heads', the symbolic significance of which we have already indicated elsewhere in connection with the ideas of 'summit' and of 'principle'.[5]

To understand what is involved we must recall that the above-mentioned peoples are among those who considered themselves as 'central'. In this connection, it is known that China was designated as the 'Middle Kingdom' (*Tchoung-kouo*), and that Egypt was assimilated by its inhabitants to the 'Heart of the World'. This 'central' situation, furthermore, is perfectly justified from the symbolic point of view because each of the countries to which it was attributed was in fact the seat of the spiritual centre of a tradition, emanation and image of the supreme spiritual centre and representing it for those pertaining to the tradition in question, so that for them it was truly the 'Centre of the World'.[6] Now the centre is, by reason of its principial status, that which one might call the 'place' of non-manifestation; and as such the colour black, understood in its higher sense, is truly apt for it. It should moreover be noted that on the contrary the colour white is also fitting for the centre in another relationship, that is, insofar as it is the starting-point of a 'radiation' comparable to that of light.[7] It could therefore be said that the centre is 'white' from the outside and in relation to the manifestation that proceeds from it, while inwardly and in itself it is 'black'; and this point of view is naturally that of the beings who, for reasons such as we have mentioned, are symbolically situated in the centre itself.

19 § The Letter G and the Swastika

In *The Great Triad* in connection with Polar symbolism and the Chinese word *i* designating unity (the Pole Star is called *Tai-i*, that is, the 'Great Unity'), we mentioned the Masonic symbolism of the letter G. The normal position of this letter is likewise 'polar', and is to be compared with the letter *I* which represented the 'first name of God' for the *Fedeli d'Amore*.[1] The letter G could

4. See especially, 'White and Black', [49 below].
5. See 'The Cornerstone', [45 below].
6. See *The Great Triad*, ch. 16.
7. See 'The Seven Rays and the Rainbow', [59 below].

1. *The Great Triad*, ch. 25.

not in itself be considered a true symbol inasmuch as it belongs to modern languages that have nothing sacred or traditional about them; but it 'stands for God' according to the English Masonic rituals, and is in fact the initial letter of the word *God* itself. Moreover its comparison with *I* is justified by the fact that, in certain cases at least, it has been considered as a substitute for the Hebrew *yodh*, symbol of the Principle or of Unity, in virtue of a phonetic assimilation between *God* and *yodh*.[2] These few remarks of ours were taken as the starting point for researches that have resulted in some new findings of the greatest interest.[3] This is why we think it worthwhile to return to this subject in order to complete what we have already said.

First of all, it is to be noted that in a very old catechism of the Companion grade,[4] the question: 'What does that G denote?', is answered, 'Geometry, or the Fifth Science' (that is, the science that ranks fifth in the traditional enumeration of the 'seven liberal arts', the esoteric transposition of which in medieval initiations we have pointed out on other occasions). This interpretation in no way contradicts the affirmation that the same letter 'stands for God', God being specially designated in that grade as 'The Great Geometer of the Universe'; and on the other hand, what gives it all its importance is that in the oldest manuscripts of operative Masonry, 'Geometry' is constantly identified with masonry itself. There is thus something here which cannot be considered negligible. Besides, as we shall now see, it appears that the letter G, as the first letter of the word *Geometry*, has assumed the place of *gamma* (Γ), its Greek equivalent, which the very origin of the word 'Geometry' sufficiently justifies (and here, at least, a modern language is no longer involved). Furthermore, this letter Γ has in itself a certain interest from the point of view of Masonic symbolism, by reason of its form which is that of the set-square[5]—obviously not the case with the Latin G.[6] Now, before going further, it might be asked if this does not contradict what was said about G being a substitute for the Hebrew *yodh*, or at least—for this substitution did in fact take place

2. The author of a work on Masonic symbolism saw fit to address to us a somewhat discourteous criticism on this point, as if we were responsible for this phonetic assimilation; nevertheless, we are not—anymore than we are for the fact that formerly the English Masons also identified the three letters of the same word *God* with the initials of the three Hebraic words *Gamel*, *Oz* and *Dabar* (Beauty, Strength, Wisdom). Let everyone think what he likes of the value of such parallels (and there are still others), but we are obliged in any case to take note of them, at least historically.

3. Marius Lepage, 'La Lettre G' in *Le Symbolisme*, November 1948; article in the *Speculative Mason*, July 1949, which was written in connection with the previous article and from which the greater part of the information used here is drawn.

4. Prichard, *Masonry Dissected*, 1730.

5. Let us recall that the set-square, of unequal branches, which has precisely the form of this letter, represents the two sides of the right angle of the 3 – 4 – 5 rectangular triangle which itself has, as we have explained elsewhere, a very special importance in operative Masonry (see 'Paroles perdues et mots substitués' in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, December 1948).

6. All the considerations which some have sought to extract from the form of the letter G (its likeness to a knot, to the alchemical symbol for salt, etc.) are manifestly quite artificial and even fanciful. They have not the least relationship with any recognized meanings of this letter, and they are not based on any authentic data.

also—if in these circumstances the idea might not have been introduced after the event and more or less belatedly; and in fact, for those who follow the most current opinion on the origin of the grade of Master it must indeed seem to be the case inasmuch as this substitution does appear to have belonged strictly speaking to the grade of Master. But the whole question is seen in a quite different light by those who, like ourselves, refuse for more than one reason to consider this grade as the product of a 'speculative' elaboration of the eighteenth century, and who see in it a kind of 'condensation' of the content of certain higher grades of operative Masonry, contrived to fill as far as possible a gap due to the ignorance of the founders of the Great Lodge of England regarding these grades. It becomes then a question of the superimposition of two different meanings that by no means exclude one another, something that is in no way exceptional in symbolism. Furthermore (which no one seems to have noticed up to this point), the two interpretations, respectively through Greek and through Hebrew, are in perfect agreement with the specific character of the two corresponding grades, 'pythagorean' for the second and 'solomonian' for the third; and perhaps, after all, it is especially here that we find what is necessary for an understanding of what is really involved.

Let us now return to the 'geometric' interpretation of the grade of Companion, and what we have said so far is not the most interesting part of that interpretation as regards the symbolism of operative Masonry. In the same catechism that was cited above, the following kind of enigma is also to be found: 'By letters four and science five, this G aright doth stand in due art and proportion'.[7] 'Science five' here obviously designates the 'fifth science', that is, Geometry. As to the significance of 'letters four', at first sight and by symmetry we might be tempted to suppose that there is a mistake and that 'letter' must be read in the singular, so that it would be a question of the 'fourth letter', that is, in the Greek alphabet, the letter *delta*, Δ, which in fact is interesting symbolically by its triangular form; but since that explanation would have the great defect of showing no intelligible relationship with the letter G, it is much more likely that it is really a question of 'four letters' and that the irregular expression *science five*, instead of *fifth science*, has been placed there intentionally to make the statement yet more enigmatic. Now the point that might seem to be the most obscure is this: why are four letters spoken of, or if it is really still a question of the initial letter of the word *Geometry*, why must it be quadrupled *to stand aright in due art and proportion?* The answer, which must

7. Incidentally, we must not forget to mention that in response to the question 'Who doth the G denote?' (*who* and not *what*, as previously, when it was a question of *Geometry*), this catechism further contains the following phrase: 'The Grand Architect and Contriver of the Universe, or He that was taken up to the Pinnacle of the Holy Temple'. It will be noted that the 'Grand Architect of the Universe' is identified here with Christ (and thus with the *Logos*), himself placed in relationship with the 'cornerstone' understood according to the sense that we have explained [below, 45]. The 'pinnacle of the Temple' (note the curious resemblance of this word with the Hebrew *pinnah* which signifies 'angle') is naturally the summit or the most elevated point and as such it is the equivalent of that which is the 'key of the arch' (Keystone) in *Arch Masonry*.

be related to the 'central' or 'polar' position of the letter G, cannot be given except by means of the symbolism of operative Masonry; and, moreover, it is here that it becomes necessary to take this letter in its Greek form, Γ, as indicated above. In fact, four *gammas* joined together at right angles form the *swastika*, 'symbol, as is also the letter G, of the Pole Star which is itself the symbol, and for the operative Mason, the actual throne of the hidden central Sun of the Universe, *Yah*',[8] which obviously calls to mind very closely the *Tai-i* of the Far Eastern tradition.[9] In the passage from *The Great Triad* which we cited at the outset of this chapter, we had already called attention to the existence, in the operative ritual, of a very close relationship between the letter G and the *swastika*; however, we did not then have the information which, by introducing the Greek Γ, makes this relationship still more direct and completes its explanation.[10] It is well to note further that the bent part of the arms of the *swastika* is considered in this context as representing the Great Bear seen in four different positions in the course of its revolution around the Pole Star, to which the centre where the four *gammas* are united naturally corresponds, and that these four positions are related to the cardinal points and the four seasons; and it is well known how important the Great Bear is in all the traditions in which polar symbolism plays a part.[11] If we consider that all this pertains to a symbolism which may truly be called 'ecumenical' and which by that very fact indicates a rather direct link with the Primordial Tradition, we can understand without difficulty why the 'polar theory has always been one of the greatest secrets of the true master Masons'.[12]

8. In the article of the *Speculative Mason* from which this citation is taken, the *swastika* is inaccurately called the *gammadion*, a designation which, as we have noted on different occasions, was in reality long ago applied to quite different figures (see '*Al-Arkān*' [47 below], where we have reproduced the *figure*); but it is none the less true that the *swastika*, though never carrying that name, can also be regarded as formed by the union of four *gammas*, so that this rectification of terminology does nothing to alter the relationship between the figure and letter in question.

9. We will add that the divine name *Yah*, which was just mentioned, is placed more especially in relation with the first of the three Grand Masters of the seventh degree of operative Masonry.

10. It might perhaps be objected that the unpublished information given by the *Speculative Mason* about the *swastika* comes from Clement Stretton and that it is said that he was the chief author of a 'restoration' of the operative rituals in which certain elements, lost as the result of circumstances never completely clarified, would have been replaced by borrowings from speculative rituals, borrowings which cannot be guaranteed to conform with what existed of old. But this objection is pointless in the present case because it is a question of something of which there is no trace whatsoever in speculative Masonry.

11. See likewise *The Great Triad* ch. 25, about the 'City of Willows' and its symbolic representation by a bushel measure filled with rice.

12. It may be interesting to note further than in the Kabbala, the *yodh* is thought of as formed by the union of three points representing the three supreme *middoth* arranged as a set-square, turned in the direction contrary to that of the Greek letter [*gamma*], which would correspond to the two opposite directions of rotation of the *swastika*.

Symbols of Cyclic Manifestation

20 § Some Aspects of the Symbolism of Janus

At different times in our writings, we have alluded to the sumbolism of Janus. It would need a whole volume to treat this subject fully with all its complex and multiple significations, and to call attention to its links with a great number of analogous figures that are to be found in other traditions.[1] Meanwhile, it seemed of interest to bring together certain aspects of the symbolism in question, and in particular to reconsider more thoroughly than we have ever yet been able to do how it is that Janus is sometimes connected with Christ, in a way that may seem strange at first sight but which is none the less perfectly justified.

In fact, a curious document expressly representing Christ in the form of Janus was published several years ago by Charbonneau-Lassay in *Regnabit*,[2] and we commented on it subsequently in the same review[3] (*figure* 11). It is a cartouche painted on a detached page of a church manuscript book, dating from the fifteenth century and found at Luchon; the painting ends the leaf for the month of January in the prefatory calender of the book. At the summit of the inner medallion is the monogram IHS surmounted by a heart; the rest of the medallion is filled with a bust of *Janus Bifrons*; as often, the two faces are male and female; the head is crowned, and one hand holds a sceptre and the other a key.

In reproducing this document, Charbonneau-Lassay writes: 'On Roman monuments, Janus is shown crowned as in the cartouche of Luchon, with the sceptre in the right hand, because he is king; he holds in the other hand a key which opens and closes the epochs; this is why, by extension of this idea, the Romans consecrated to him the doorways of houses and the gates to cities .... Christ, also, like the ancient Janus, holds the royal sceptre to which he is entitled by his Heavenly Father as well as by his earthly ancestry; and his other hand holds the key to the eternal secrets, the key

1. [The author added: 'which perhaps we will write some day'. Readers will regret that this project was not to have been realised; but a certain number of studies which would be appropriate in a volume on Janus will be found here, in this very collection.]

2. 'Un ancien emblème du mois de janvier', *Regnabit*, May 1925.

3. 'A propos de quelques symboles hermetico-religieux' *Regnabit*, December 1925.

Figure 11

coloured by his blood which opens to lost humanity the doorway to life. Thus in the fourth of the great antiphons before Christmas, the sacred liturgy acclaims him thus: *O Clavis David et Sceptrum domus Israel*! . . . Thou art, O Christ, long awaited, the Key of David and the Sceptre of the house of Israel. Who openest, and no man shutteth, who shuttest and no man openeth'.[4]

The most common interpretation of the two faces of Janus is that which considers them as representing respectively the past and the future. This interpretation, although very incomplete, is nevertheless exact from a certain point of view. This is why in a rather large number of figurations the two faces are those of an old man and of a young man. It must be added that such is not the case with the emblem of Luchon: we have only to look at it closely to see beyond doubt that it is a portrayal of Janus the androgyne or *Janus-Jana*;[5] and it is hardly necessary to call attention to the close relation of this form of Janus with certain Hermetic symbols such as the *Rebis*.[6]

Whenever the symbolism of Janus relates to time, it is important to remember that between the past which is no longer and the future which is not yet, the true face of Janus, that which looks at the present, is neither one nor the other of those that we can see. This third face is, in fact, invisible because the present in its temporal manifestation is but an ungraspable instant;[7] but when one rises above the conditions of this transitory and contingent manifestation, the present, on the contrary, contains all reality.

4. *Roman Breviary*, office of 20 December. [This antiphon is from the *Breviary* as it existed before Vatican II. Tr.]

5. The name *Diana*, lunar goddess, is another form of *Jana*, the feminine aspect of Janus.

6. The only difference is that these symbols are generally *Sol-Luna*, in diverse forms, while it seems that *Janus-Jana* is rather *Lunus-Luna*, the head often being surmounted by the crescent.

7. It is also for this reason that certain languages, such as Hebrew and Arabic, do not have a verbal form that corresponds to the present.

The third face of Janus, in another symbolism, that of the Hindu tradition, corresponds to the frontal eye of Shiva, which is also invisible, not being represented by any corporeal organ, and which represents the 'sense of eternity'. It is said that a glance from this third eye reduces everything to ashes, that is, it destroys all manifestation. But when succession is transmuted into simultaneity, all things remain in the eternal present, so that the apparent destruction is really a transformation in the most rigorously etymological sense of this word.

These few considerations make it easy to understand that Janus truly represents him who is not only the 'Master of the triple time' (a designation which is also applied to Shiva in the Hindu doctrine),[8] but also, and before all else, the 'Lord of Eternity'. 'Christ', as Charbonneau-Lassay wrote further in this connection, 'dominates the past and the future; coeternal with his Father, he is like his Father, the "Ancient of Days": "in the beginning was the Word", says St John. He is also the Father and the Master of the ages to come: *Jesu pater futuri saeculi*, the Roman Church repeats each day.[9] He Himself proclaimed Himself as the beginning and the end of all; "I am the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the beginning and the end". He is "Lord of Eternity".'

It is quite evident, in fact, that the 'Master of time' cannot himself be subject to time which has its principle in him, just as, according to Aristotle, the prime mover of all things or the universal principle of movement is necessarily immobile. It is certainly the eternal Word which the Biblical texts often designate as the 'Ancient of Days', the ages or cycles of existence (this is the true and original significance of the Latin word *saeculum*, as well as of the Greek *aion* and of the Hebrew *ōlam* which it translates); and it may be noted that the Hindu tradition gives to the Word the title *Purāna-Purusha*, the significance of which is strictly equivalent.

To return to the figure which we took as starting point for these remarks, the sceptre and the key are to be seen there in the hands of Janus. Like the crown, the sceptre is the emblem of royal power; but the crown can also be considered as symbol of power and of elevation in the most general sense, in the spiritual as well as in the temporal order, and it seems to have here, unlike the sceptre, this twofold significance. The key may thus be taken as being more specifically the emblem of sacerdotal power. It must be noted that the sceptre is at the left of the figure, on the side of the male face, and the key is on the right, on the side of the female face. Now, according to the symbolism used by the Hebrew Kabbala, the right and left correspond respectively to two divine attributes: Mercy (*Hesed*) and Justice (*Din*),[10] which are manifestly appropriate for Christ, especially as

8. The trident (*trishula*), attribute of Shiva, is the symbol of the triple time (*trikala*).

9. [This also has been omitted as a result of Vatican II. Tr.]

10. In the symbolism of the Sephirothic tree, which represents the totality of the divine attributes, the two lateral 'colums' are respectively those of Mercy and of Justice. At the summit of the 'middle column' and dominating the two lateral 'columns' is the 'Crown' (*Kether*); its position, analogous to the crown of Janus (see *figure* 11) in relation to the key and the sceptre, would seem to make way for a comparison justifying what we have just said about its signification: this would be the principial power, single and total, from which proceed the two aspects designated by the two other emblems.

Judge of the living and the dead. The Arabs, making an analogous distinction in the divine attributes and the names that correspond to them, speak of 'Beauty' (*Jamāl*) and 'Majesty' (*Jalāl*), which makes it even more understandable that these two aspects should have been represented by a female and a male face.[11] In a word, the key and the sceptre, taking the place here of Janus's more common emblem of the two keys, serve to make even clearer one of the meanings of this emblem, which is that of a double power proceeding from a single principle: the sacerdotal power and the royal power, united according to the Judeo-Christian tradition, in the person of Melchisedech who is, as St Paul said, 'made like unto the Son of God'.[12]

We have just said that Janus commonly carries two keys. These are those of the solstitial gates, *Janua Cœli* and *Janua Inferni*, corresponding respectively to the winter and summer solstices, that is, to the two extreme points in the course of the sun in its annual cycle, for Janus, as 'Master of time', is the Janitor who opens and closes this cycle. On the other hand, he is also the god of initiation into the mysteries. *Initiatio* derives from *in-ire*, 'enter' (which is also connected with the symbolism of the gate); and, according to Cicero, the name Janus has the same root as the verb *ire*, to go. This root *i* is found, moreover, in Sanskrit with the same sense as in Latin; and in Sanskrit it has among its derivatives the word *yāna*, 'way', the form of which is singularly close to the very name Janus. 'I am the way', said Christ.[13] Is it possible to see here yet another connection between the two? What we are about to say would seem to justify it; and it would be a grave mistake, where symbolism is concerned, not to take into account certain verbal similitudes, the reasons for which are often very profound even though, unfortunately, they escape modern philologists who are ignorant of all that can legitimately be called 'sacred science'.

However that may be, insofar as Janus was considered as the god of initiation, his two keys, one of gold and the other of silver, were those of the 'greater mysteries' and of the 'lesser mysteries'. In other but equivalent terms, the silver key is that of the terrestrial Paradise, and the gold key that of the celestial Paradise. These same keys were one of the attributes of the sovereign pontificate to which the function of 'hierophant' was essentially attached. Like the barque, which was also a symbol of Janus,[14] they have remained among the chief emblems of the papacy; and the Gospel words concerning the 'power of the keys' are in perfect accord with the ancient traditions, all rising from the great primordial tradition. There is, in addition, a very direct relationship between the meaning we have just mentioned and that of

11. In *The Lord of the World* we have explained more completely the symbolism of the right and of the left, of the 'hand of justice' and the 'hand of blessing', which is also pointed out by several Fathers of the Church, and especially by St Augustine.

12. *Epistle to the Hebrews* VII: 3, ... *assimilatus autem Filio Dei* ....

13. In the Far Eastern tradition, the word *Tao*, the literal sense of which is also 'way', serves as designation of the supreme Principle; and the ideographic character which represents it is formed from the signs for the head and the feet, being thus the equivalent of *alpha* and *omega*.

14. This barque of Janus was one that could move in both directions, forward and backward, which corresponds to the two faces of Janus himself.

the gold key representing the spiritual power and the silver key the temporal power (the silver key being replaced at times by the sceptre as we have seen).[15] Dante, in fact, assigns to the Emperor and to the Pope the functions of leading humanity respectively to the 'terrestrial Paradise' and to the 'celestial Paradise'.[16]

Moreover, in virtue of a certain astronomical symbolism which seems to have been common to all the ancient peoples, there are also very close links between the two interpretations according to which the keys of Janus were either those of the solstitial gates or those of the 'greater mysteries' and of the 'lesser mysteries'. The symbolism we are alluding to is that of the zodiacal cycle, and it is not without reason that this cycle, with its two ascending and descending halves which begin respectively at the two solstices of winter and summer, should be represented on the portals of so many medieval churches. We see here another meaning of the two faces of Janus: he is the 'Master of the two ways' to which the solsticial gates give access, these two ways of the right and of the left (for there we find again that other symbolism indicated above) which the Pythagoreans represented by the letter Y,[17] and which were represented under an exoteric form by the myth of Hercules between virtue and vice. These are the same two ways which the Hindu tradition terms the 'way of the gods' (*deva-yāna*) and the 'way of the ancestors' (*pitri-yāna*); and *Ganesha*, whose symbolism has numerous points of contact with that of Janus, is likewise the 'Master of the two ways' by an immediate consequence of his being 'Lord of Knowledge', which brings us back to the idea of initiation into the mysteries. Finally, like the doorways by which one has access to them, these two ways are, in a sense, those of the heavens and of the hells;[18] and it will be noted that the two sides to which they correspond, right and left, are those whereto the elect and the damned are separated in the representations of the Last Judgement which are also so frequently to be found, by a most significant coincidence, on the portals of churches but not in any other part of the edifice.[19] These representations, like those of the Zodiac, would seem to express something fundamental in

15. The sceptre and the key, moreover, are both related symbolically to the *axis mundi*.

16. *De Monarchia*, III: 16. We give the explanation of this passage of Dante in *Autorité spirituelle et Pouvoir temporel*.

17. This ancient symbol was preseved until relatively recent times; we have found it, for example, in the imprint of the printer Nicholas du Chemin, designed by Jean Cousin, in *Le Champ fleuri* of Geoffroy Tory (Paris, 1529), where it is named 'Pythagoric letter'; and also at the Louvre, on various pieces of Renaissance furniture.

18. In the symbols of the Renaissance which we just mentioned, the two ways are in this respect designated as *via arcta* and *via lata*, 'narrow way' and 'broad way'.

19. It sometimes seems that what is represented on the right in certain cases is on the left in others, and vice versa. It happens, furthermore, that this contradiction is only apparent, for one must always seek the reference point by which right or left is determined. When the contradiction is real it is explained by certain very complex cyclical conceptions which influence the correspondences under consideration. We note this only to avoid covering up a difficulty which ought to be taken into account in order to interpret correctly a large number of symbols [cf., *The Great Triad*, ch. 17].

the conception of the cathedral builders who were bent on giving their works a 'pantacular' character in the true sense of the word,[20] that is, to make of each a sort of synthetic epitome of the Universe.[21]

21 § The Hieroglyph of Cancer

In the course of our different studies, we have often had occasion to allude to the symbolism of the annual cycle with its two halves, ascending and descending; and especially to that of the two solstitial gates, which are related to the figure of *Janus* among the Latins as with that of *Ganesha* among the Hindus.[1] In order to understand adequately all the importance of this symbolism, it must be remembered that in virtue of the analogy of each part of the Universe with the whole, there is correspondence between the laws of all the cycles, of whatever order they may be, so that the annual cycle, for example, can be taken as a reduced and therefore more accessible image of the great cosmic cycles (and an expression such as that of the 'Great Year' indicates this clearly enough), and as a summary, so to speak, of the whole process of universal manifestation itself. It is this, moreover, which gives astrology all its significance as a strictly cosmological science.

It follows that the two 'stopping points' of the solar procession (and this is the etymological sense of the word 'solstice') must correspond to the two extreme terms of manifestation, either in its entirety or in each of the cycles which constitute it, cycles which are of an incalculable multitude, and which are nothing other than the different states or degrees of Universal Existence. If this be applied more particularly to a cycle of individual manifestation such as that of existence in the human state, it will be easy to understand why the two solstitial gates are traditionally designated as the 'gate of men' and the 'gate of the gods'. The 'gate of men', corresponding likewise to the summer solstice and to the zodiacal sign of Cancer, is the entry into individual manifestation. The 'gate of the gods', corresponding in the same way to the winter solstice and to the zodiacal sign of Capricorn, is the exit from this same individual manifestation and the passage to the higher states, in that the gods (the *devas* of the Hindu tradition), like the 'angels' according to another

20. One should write 'pantacle' (*pantaculum*, literally 'little all'), and not 'pentacle' as is too often done; this spelling error has led to the belief that the word is related to the number 5 and that it should be taken as a synonym of 'pentagram'.

21. Furthermore, this conception is in a way implied in the very plan of the cathedral; but for the moment at least we cannot undertake to justify this affirmation, which would lead us much too far afield.

1. See especially *The Lord of the World*, ch. 3.

terminology, represent, from the metaphysical point of view, the supra-individual states of being.[2]

If we consider the distribution of zodiacal signs according to the four elemental trigons, we see that the sign of Cancer corresponds to the 'depth of the waters', that is, in the cosmogonic sense, to the embryonic setting in which are deposited the seeds of the manifested world. These seeds correspond, in the 'macrocosmic' order, to the *Brahmānda* or 'World Egg'; and in the 'microcosmic' order, to the *pinda*, formal prototype of the individuality pre-existing in subtle mode from the origin of the cyclic manifestation as constituting one of the possibilities which must be developed in the course of that manifestation.[3] This can be related also to the fact that this same sign of Cancer is the domicile of the Moon of which the relation with the Waters is well known and which, like the Waters themselves, represents the passive and plastic principle of manifestation: the sphere of the Moon is in fact the 'world of formation', or the domain of the elaboration of forms in the subtle state, the starting point of individual existence.[4]

In the astrological symbol of Cancer ♋, the seed is seen in the state of half development, which is precisely the subtle state; it is thus a question not of the corporeal embryo but of the above-mentioned formal prototype, the existence of which is situated in the psychic domain or 'intermediary world'. Moreover, its representation is that of the Sanskrit *u*, a spiral element which, in the *akshara* or sacred monosyllable *Om*, constitutes the intermediary term between the point (*m*), representing principial non-manifestation, and the straight line (*a*), representing the complete development of manifestation in the gross or corporeal state.[5]

In addition, the seed is double here, placed in two positions, the one the inverse of the other and thus representing two complementary terms. This is the *yang* and the *yin* of the Far Eastern tradition where the *yin-yang* symbol which unites them has in fact a similar form. This symbol, as representative of the cyclic revolutions, the phases of which are bound up with alternating predominance of *yang* and of *yin*, is not unconnected with other figures of great importance from the traditional point of view, such as the *swastika*,

2. This point is explained more amply in *The Multiple States of the Being*.

3. See *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedanta*, ch. 13 and 19. The constitutive analogy of the 'microcosm' and of the 'macrocosm', considered under this aspect, is expressed in the Hindu doctrine by this formula: *Yathā pinda Tathā Brahmānda*, 'as the (subtle) individual embryo, so the "World Egg".'

4. See *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedanta*, ch. 21. We have pointed out on several occasions the identity of the 'world of formation', or *Yetsirah* according to the Hebrew Kabbala, with the domain of subtle manifestation.

5. On these geometrical forms corresponding respectively to the three *mātrās* of *OM*, see *ibid.* ch. 17. It is well to recall in this connection that the point is the primordial principle of all geometrical figures as the non-manifest is of the states of manifestation and that, being supra formal and 'without dimensions', it is, in its own order, true indivisible unity, which makes it a natural symbol of pure Being. [The author explained to me that the 'geometrical hieroglyph' of *Om* (aum) referred to here and elsewhere in his writings is ⏦. Ed.]

and also the double spiral which is related to the symbolism of the two hemispheres. These, the one luminuous and the other dark (*yang*, in its original signification is the side of light, and *yin* that of shadow), are the two halves of the 'World Egg', assimilated respectively to Heaven and

Figure 12

Earth.[6] These are also, for each being, and always in virtue of the analogy of the 'microcosm' with the 'macrocosm', the two halves of the primordial Androgyne which, generally speaking, is described symbolically as being of spherical form.[7] This spherical form is that of the complete being which is in a state of virtuality in the original seed and which has to be reconstituted in its actual plenitude at the term of the development of the individual cycle.

It is to be noted, on the other hand, that each element of the hieroglyph is also shaped like the conch (*shankha*), which obviously has a direct relationship with the Waters and which is likewise represented as containing the seeds of the future cycle during the periods of *pralaya* or 'outward dissolution' of the world. This conch encloses the primordial and unperishable sound (*akshara*), the monosyllable *OM* which, by its three elements (*mātrās*), is the essence of the triple *Veda*; and it is thus that the *Veda* subsists perpetually, being in itself before all the worlds but as it were hidden or enveloped during the cosmic catyclysms which separate the different cycles, to be subsequently manifested anew at the beginning of each of them.[8] Furthermore, the schema can be completed as being that of the *akshara* itself, the straight line (*a*) covering and closing the conch (*u*), which contains within it the point (*m*), or the

6. With the Greeks, these two hemispheres were represented by the round coifs of the *Dioscures*, Castor and Pollux, who are the two halves of the egg of Leda, that is, the egg of the swan which, like the serpent's egg, represents the 'World Egg'.

7. See, for example, the discourse that Plato in *The Symposium* places in the mouth of Aristophanes; most modern commentaries fail to recognise its symbolic value, which is none the less evident. We have dwelt in more detail on this spherical form in *The Symbolism of the Cross*.

8. The affirmation of the perpetuity of the *Veda* must be linked directly to the cosmological theory of the primordiality of sound (*shabda*) among the sensible qualities (as the quality that belongs to ether, *Ākāsha*, which is the first of the elements); and this theory must itself be related to that of 'creation by the Word' in the Western traditions. The Primordial sound is the divine Word 'by which all things were made'.

essential principle of all beings.[9] By its horizontality, the straight line then represents at the same time the 'surface of the Waters', that is, the substantial setting in which the seeds will be developed (this development being represented in Oriental symbolism by the blooming of the lotus flower) after the end of the intermediary period of obscuration (*sandhya*) between two cycles. At this stage, keeping to the same schematic representation, we will have a figure that can be described as the turning round of the conch, as it opens to allow the seed to escape along the straight line now oriented in a vertical downward direction which is that of the development of manifestation starting from its unmanifested principle.[10]

Of these two positions of the conch, which are to be found in the two halves of the symbol of Cancer, the first corresponds to the ark of Noah (or of *Satyavrata* in the Hindu tradition) which can be represented as the lower half of a circumference closed by its horizontal diameter and containing within it the point in which are synthetised all the seeds in the state of complete envelopment.[11] The second position is symbolised by the rainbow, appearing 'in the clouds', that is, in the region of the Upper Waters, at the moment which marks the re-establishment of order and the restoration of all things, whereas during the cataclysm, the ark floated on the ocean of the Lower Waters. The rainbow is therefore the upper half of the same circumference; and the reunion of the two figures, inverse and complementary to one another, forms a single complete circular or cyclic figure, reconstituting the primordial spherical form. This circumference is the vertical section of the sphere of which the horizontal section is represented by the circular enclosure of the terrestrial Paradise.[12] Inside the Far-Eastern *yin-yang* the same two half circumferences are to be found, but they are displaced by a duplication of the centre representing a polarisation which is, for each state of manifestation, the analogue of what the polarisation of *Sat*, or pure Being, into *Purusha-Prakriti* is for universal manifestation.[13]

9. By quite a remarkable concordance, this schema is also that of the human ear, the organ of hearing which, in order to be apt for the perception of sound, has to be actually shaped in conformity with the nature of sound.

10. This new figure [ח] is that which is given in the Archéometre for the letter *heth* which corresponds to the zodiacal sign of Cancer. [The astral alphabet in question, known as *Watan* or *Vatan*, was the primeval script of the Atlantids, and it was also known to the Hindus, who alone retained the knowledge of it after the destruction of Atlantis. The three first letters stood for the principial triad, then seven for the planets and twelve for the zodiacal signs, 22 in all. See Michel Vâlsan, *Etudes Traditionnelles*, March–April 1964, pp. 85–90. Ed.]

11. The half circumference must be considered here as a morphological equivalent of the spiral element which we mentioned earlier; but in that the actualisation of the development from the initial seed-point is clearly visible.

12. See *The Lord of the World*, ch. 11. This is also related to the mysteries of the letter *nūn* in the Arabic alphabet. [See below, 25, 'The Mysteries of the Letter *Nūn*'.]

13. This is a first distinction or differentiation, but still without a separation of the complementaries. The constitution of the Androgyne itself corresponds to this stage, while prior to this differentiation we can only speak of a 'neutrality' which is that of pure Being (see *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 30).

These considerations have no claim to be complete, and doubtless they correspond only to some of the aspects of the sign of Cancer. But at least they will serve, by way of example, to show that there is in traditional astrology something quite different from the 'divinatory art' or the 'conjectural science' that the modern outlook supposes it to be. In reality it contains all that is to be found, variously expressed, in other sciences of the same order, as we have already indicated in our study on the 'science of letters',[14] and all that gives these sciences a truly initiatic value, in virtue of which they can indeed be considered as an integral part of 'Sacred Science'.

22 § Seth

Kāna l-insānu ḥayyatan fil-qidam[1]
('Man was formerly a serpent'.)

In a curious book on the 'last times', *The Antichrist (Personal, Future)* by E. H. Moggridge, there is a point which we noticed in particular and about which we should like to offer some clarifications, namely, the interpretation of the names Nimrod and Seth. As a matter of fact, the assimilation that the author establishes between the one and the other calls for many reservations, but there is at least a certain real relationship and the comparisons drawn from animal symbolism seem to us to be well-founded.

Let us point out first of all that *namar* in Hebrew, like *nimr* in Arabic, is strictly speaking the 'flecked animal', a name common to the tiger, the panther and the leopard; and we can say, even if we keep to their most outward meaning, that these animals indeed represent the 'hunter' that Nimrod was according to the Bible. Furthermore, in an aspect which need not be considered as unfavourable, the tiger is, like the bear in the Nordic tradition, a symbol of the Kshatriya; and the foundation of Nineveh and of the Assyrian empire by Nimrod actually seems to have been a revolt of the Kshatriyas against the authority of the Chaldean sacerdotal caste. Thence the legendary relationship established between Nimrod and the *Nephilim* or other antediluvian 'giants' which the Kshatriyas also represent in ancient times; and thence the epithet of 'nimrodian' applied to a temporal power which affirms itself as independent of the spiritual authority.

14. [See ch. 8, above.]

1. [This saying, for which the author gives no source, is no doubt to be understood in relation to what is said in notes 4 and 9 (which refers to ch. 27, below) about the serpent producing from its mouth the 'World Egg', that is, the Word and the Serpent which is itself identified with the Word (cf., *Numbers* xxi: 9 and John iii: 14). Man's human nature is a projection of his spiritual nature, which has its prototype in the Logos, that is, in the 'Serpent'. Ed.]

Now, what has all this to do with Seth? The tiger and other similar animals, inasmuch as they are 'destroyers', are emblems of the Egyptian Set, Osiris's brother and murderer, to whom the Greeks gave the name of Typhon. And one can only say that the 'Nimrodian' spirit proceeds from the dark principle designated by the name *Set*, without for all that claiming that Set is identical with Nimrod himself; we have here a distinction that is more than a mere nuance. But the point that seems to give rise to the greatest difficulty is this malefic signification of the name *Set* or *Sheth* or *Seth* which, on the other hand, insofar as it designates the son of Adam, far from signifying destruction, on the contrary evokes the idea of stability and the restoration of order. Besides, if one wants to establish Biblical comparisons, Set is to Osiris what Cain is to Abel; and we will mention in this connection that some make of Nimrod one of the 'Cainites' thought to have escaped from the diluvial cataclysm. But the Seth of *Genesis*, far from being assimilable to Cain, is opposed to him. How then does his name come to be here? In fact, even in Hebrew, the word *Seth* really has the two contrary senses, that of 'foundation' and that of 'tumult' and 'ruin';[2] and the expression *beni-Seth* (sons of Seth) is also found with this double meaning. It is true that the linguists prefer to see two distinct words there, deriving from two different verbal roots: *sith* [*shith*] for the first, and *sath* [*shath*] for the second; but the distinction between these two roots seems to be quite secondary, and in any case their essential constituent elements are certainly identical. In reality, nothing is to be seen there but an application of that double meaning of symbols to which we have often had occasion to allude; and this application relates more particularly to the symbolism of the serpent.

Indeed, if the tiger or leopard is one symbol of the Egyptian *Set*, the serpent is another,[3] and this can be understood without difficulty if the serpent be considered under its malefic aspect, that which is most commonly attributed to it. But it is almost always forgotten that the serpent has a benefic aspect which, moreover, is to be found also in the symbolism of ancient Egypt, in particular under the form of the royal serpent, the 'uraeus' or basilisk.[4] Even in Christian iconography the serpent is sometimes the symbol of Christ;[5] and the Biblical Seth, whose function in the legend of the Grail[6] we have noted elsewhere, is often looked on as a 'prefiguration' of Christ.[7] It can be said that the two *Seths*, fundamentally, are not other than the two serpents of the Hermetic

2. The word is identical in the two cases but, curiously enough, it is masculine in the first and feminine in the second.

3. It is rather remarkable that the Greek name *Typhon* should be an anagram of *Python*.

4. Let us recall also the serpent representing *Kneph*, and producing the 'World Egg' from its mouth (symbol of the Word); it is known that for the Druids the Word was likewise the 'serpent's egg' (represented by the fossil sea urchin).

5. In *The Lord of the World* ch. 3, we noted in this respect the figuration of the 'amphisbene' or two headed serpent, of which the one head represents Christ and the other Satan.

6. *Ibid.*, ch. 5.

7. It is probable that those Gnostics called Sethians did not really differ from the 'Ophites', for whom the serpent (*ophis*) was the symbol of the Word and of Wisdom (*Sophia*).

caduceus.[8] It is, if one will, life and death, both produced by a power that is single in its essence but double in its manifestation.[9]

If we stop to dwell on this interpretation in terms of life and death, even though it is only a particular application of the case of two contrary or antagonistic terms, it is because the symbolism of the serpent is actually linked, before all else, to the very idea of life:[10] in Arabic, the serpent is *al-ḥayyah*, and life *al-ḥayah* (Hebrew *hayah*, meaning both 'life' and 'animal', from the root *hayi* which is common to the two languages). This is linked to the symbolism of the 'Tree of Life',[11] and thus enables one to glimpse a singular relationship between the serpent and Eve (*Ḥawwā*, 'the living'); and we may recall the medieval representations of the 'temptation' in which the body of the serpent entwined around the forbidden tree is surmounted by the bust of a woman.[12] Equally remarkable is the fact that in Chinese symbolism *Fo-hi* and his sister *Niu-Koua*, who are said to have reigned together forming a fraternal couple (such as had its counterparts in ancient Egypt and even down to the time of the Ptolemys) are sometimes represented with the body of a serpent and a human head; and in certain cases these two serpents are intertwined like those of the caduceus, no doubt thereby alluding to the complementarism of the *yin-yang*.[13] Without insisting anymore upon this, which would risk leading us rather far afield, we can see that it all shows the serpent to have had, doubtless in very remote times, an importance which is no longer suspected today; and anyone who studied closely all the aspects of its symbolism, especially in Egypt and in India, might well be led to quite unexpected conclusions.

On the subject of the double sense of symbols, it is to be noted that even the number 666 does not have an exclusively malefic significance. If it is the 'number of the Beast', it is in the first place a solar number and, as we have said elsewhere,[14] it is that of *Hakathriel* or the 'Angel of the Crown'. On the other hand, the letters of the name Sorath also add up to this number, and *Sorath*, according to the Kabbalists, is the solar demon. As such he is opposed to the Archangel *Mikaël*, and this has to do with the two faces of *Metatron*.[15]

8. It is curious that the name of Seth, reduced to its essential elements, ST in the Latin alphabet (which is only a form of the Phoenician alphabet), gives the figure of the 'brazen serpent'. In this connection, let us note that in Hebrew it is in fact the same word that signifies 'serpent' (*nahash*) and 'bronze' or 'copper' (*nehash*). In Arabic another and no less strange relationship is to be found: *naḥs*, 'calamity'; and *naḥās*, 'copper'.

9. On this point, see our study of 'Thunderbolts' [27 below].

10. This sense is particularly obvious for the serpent that is entwined around the rod of Aesculapius.

11. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 25.

12. An example of this is to be found on the left portal of Notre Dame.

13. Is it said that *Niu-Koua* melted stones of five colours (white, black, red, yellow, blue) to repair a rent in the heavens, and also that she cut off the four feet of the tortoise in order to place there the four extremities of the world.

14. *The Lord of the World*, ch. 5.

15. *Ibid.*, ch. 3.

Sorath is moreover, the anagram of sthur which signifies 'hidden thing'. Is this the 'name of mystery' of which the *Apocalypse* speaks? But if *sathar* signifies 'to hide', it also signifies 'to protect'; and in Arabic the same word *satar* evokes almost without exception the idea of protection, and often even the idea of a divine and providential protection.[16] Here, too, things are much less simple than they are thought to be by those who see only one aspect of a question.

But let us return to the animals that symbolise the Egyptian *Set*. There is also the crocodile, which is self-explanatory; and the hippopatamus, in which some have been inclined to see the *Behemoth* of the Book of *Job*, and perhaps not without some justification, although this word (plural of *behemah*) is strictly speaking a collective designation of all the great quadrapeds.[17] But another animal which has no less importance in this context than the hippopotamus, strange though it may seem, is the ass, and more especially the red ass,[18] which was represented as one of the most fearful of all the entities among those which the dead had to encounter in their journey beyond the grave, or, which esoterically comes to the same, that the initiate encounters in the course of his trials. Would this not be, even more than the hippopotamus, the 'scarlet beast' of the *Apocalypse*?[19] In any case, one of the darkest aspects of the 'typhonian' mysteries was the cult of the 'god with the ass's head', to which, as is known, the first Christians were sometimes falsely accused of belonging. We have some reasons for believing that, under one form or another, it has persisted until our own times, and some assert that it is bound to endure until the end of the current cycle.

From this last point, we want to draw at least one conclusion: at the decline of a civilisation, it is the most inferior side of its tradition which persists the longest, in particular the 'magical' side, which, moreover, contributes to the complete ruin of the tradition by the deviations it gives rise to. This is said to be what happened with Atlantis.[20] Magic is also the only immaterial thing of which the debris still survive from civilisations which have entirely ceased to function–witness the cases of Egypt, of Chaldea, even of Druidism; and no doubt the 'fetishism' of the negro peoples has a similar origin. Sorcery could be said to be made of the vestiges of dead civilisations. Is this why the serpent, in the most recent times, has hardly kept anything but its malefic

16. Could we, without too much linguistic fantasy, relate this to the Greek *soter*, 'saviour'? And should it be said in this respect that there may and even must be, between the designations of Christ (*al-Masīḥ*) and of the Antichrist (*al-Masīkh*) a singular resemblance? [See on this subject, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 39.]

17. The root *baham* or *abham* signifies 'to be mute' and also 'to be hidden'. If the general sense of *Behemoth* is linked to the first of these two ideas, the second can evoke more particularly the animal 'which hides under the reeds'; and here the relationship with the sense of the other root, *sathar*, of which we have just spoken, is rather curious.

18. Yet another strange linguistic connection: in Arabic, 'ass' is *ḥimār* (in Hebrew, *hemor*); and red is *aḥmar*. The 'red ass', therefore, would be, like the bronze serpent, a kind of pleonasm in phonetic symbolism.

19. In India, the ass is the symbolic mount of *Mudevi*, the infernal aspect of the *Shakti*.

20. [*The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 38, pp. 315–17, and especially note 160.]

significance, and why the dragon, ancient Chinese symbol of the Word, awakens only 'diabolical' ideas in the minds of modern Westerners?[21]

23 § On the Significance of Carnivals

IN connection with a certain 'theory of festivals' formulated by a sociologist, we have pointed out[1] that this theory has, among other deficiencies, the weakness of wanting to reduce all festivals to a single type, that of what may be called 'carnival' festivals, an expression which seems to us clear enough to be understood by everyone, as in fact carnival represents what is still left of festival today in the West; and we said at that time that this kind of festival raises questions which can call for a more thorough examination. In fact, the impression that emerges from them is always and above all else that of *disorder*, in the most complete sense of this word. How then does it happen that they are to be found, not only in our time, but also and even with a more ample development, in traditional civilisations with which they seem at first sight incompatible? If they pertained specifically to our own times, they could be considered simply as one of the numerous manifestations of the general disequilibrium.

We may as well give here some definite examples, and we will mention first certain truly strange festivals which were celebrated in the Middle Ages: the 'feast of the ass' where this animal, whose distinctly satanic symbolism is well known in all traditions,[2] was even brought into the very choir of the church where it occupied the place of honour and received the most extraordinary tokens of veneration; also, the 'feast of fools', wherein the lower clergy gave themselves up to the worst improprieties, parodying both the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the liturgy itself.[3] How is it possible to explain that in such a period things whose most evident characteristic is incontestably that of parody and even of sacrilege[4] were not only tolerated but even given an as it were official sanction?

21. *Ibid.*, ch. 30, 'The Inversion of Symbols', pp. 245–47.]

1. See *Etudes Traditionnelles*, April 1940, p. 169.

2. It would be wrong to maintain that this is contradicted by the part played by the ass in the Gospel tradition, for in fact the ox and the ass placed on either side of the manger at the birth of Christ symbolise respectively the totality of benefic and malefic forces. These are to be found again at the crucifixion, in the form of the good and bad thief. On the other hand, Christ mounted upon an ass at his entry into Jerusalem, represents the triumph over the forces of evil, a triumph whose realisation constitutes precisely the 'redemption'.

3. These 'fools' wore a headdress with long ears, obviously intended to evoke the notion of an ass's head; and this feature is not the least significant from our point of view.

4. The author of the theory to which we have alluded recognised well enough the existence of this parody and of this sacrilege; but, linking them to his general conception of 'festival', he attempts to make of them characteristic elements of the 'sacred' itself–something that is not only too much of a paradox but, let it be said plainly, a contradiction pure and simple.

We will also mention the Roman Saturnalia from which, moreover, the modern carnival seems to have been directly derived, though in fact it is no longer anything but a very diminished vestige: during these festivals, the slaves ordered the masters about, and the masters served the slaves.[5] One then had the image of a truly 'upside down' world, wherein everything was done in reverse of the normal order.[6] Although it is commonly claimed that these festivals were a reminder of the 'golden age', this interpretation is clearly false; for there is no question here of any kind of 'equality' that could strictly be regarded as representing, insofar as is possible in present conditions,[7] the primordial indifferentiation of social functions. It is a question of the reversal of hierarchies, which is something completely different; and such a reversal constitutes, generally speaking, one of the plainest characteristics of satanism. We must therefore see here something that relates much rather to the sinister aspect of Saturn, an aspect which certainly does not pertain to him as god of the 'golden age' but, on the contrary, insofar as he is now no more than the fallen god of a bygone and finished period.[8]

It can be seen by these examples that there is invariably a sinister and even satanic element in such festivals; and it should be noted in particular that this very element is precisely what pleases the mob and excites its gaiety. There is something here, in fact, that is very apt–and even more so than anything else–to satisfy the tendencies of fallen man, insofar as these tendencies push him to develop the lowest possibilities of his nature. Now it is just in this that the real point of such festivals lies: it is a question of somehow 'channeling' these tendencies, and of thus making them as inoffensive as possible by giving them an opportunity to manifest themselves, but only during very brief periods and in very well defined circumstances, and by thus enclosing this manifestation within narrow limits which it is not allowed to overstep.[9] Otherwise these same tendencies, for want of the minimum satisfaction required by the present

5. Festivals of this same kind are even encountered in many different countries, when they went so far as to confer temporarily on a slave or on a criminal the insignia of royalty with all the power that goes with it, only to put him to death once the festival ended.

6. In this connection, the same author speaks also of 'reverse acts' and even of a 'return to chaos', which contains at least a part of the truth; but by an astonishing confusion of ideas, he seeks to assimilate this chaos to the 'golden age'.

7. We mean the conditions of the *Kali-Yuga* or the 'iron age', of which the Roman period, as well as our own, was a part.

8. That the ancient gods became demons in a certain manner is a fact quite generally established, and the attitude of the Christians towards the gods of 'paganism' is merely a particular case, but one which never seems to have been explained as it should; we cannot insist on this point here, which would lead us too far from our subject. It is, of course, to be understood that this is related solely to certain cyclic conditions, and does not affect or modify in any way the essential character of these same gods insofar as they symbolise, beyond time, supra-human principles. Thus side by side with their accidentally malefic aspect, the benefic aspect always exists in spite of everything and even though it is completely unrecognised by 'men outside'. The astrological interpretation of Saturn can be taken as a very clear example in this respect.

9. This relates to the symbolic 'enframing' to which we propose to return [see below, 68].

condition of humanity, would be at risk of exploding, so to speak,[10] and of spreading their effects everywhere, collectively as well as individually, causing thereby a disorder far more serious than that which is produced only during some few days specially reserved for this purpose, and which is all the less to be feared for being thus 'regularised'. For on the one hand these days are placed outside the normal course of things, so as not to exert any appreciable influence upon it, while, on the other hand, the fact that there is nothing unforeseen in these festivals 'normalises' as it were the disorder itself and integrates it into the total order.

Apart from this general explanation, which no one who is prepared to think about it can fail to understand, it will be as well to say something in particular about the 'masquerades' which play an important part in carnivals themselves, and in other more or less similar festivals; and what we have to say will confirm still further what we have just said. In fact, carnival masks are generally hideous and most often evoke animal or demonic forms so that they are like a figurative 'materialisation' of the inferior and even infernal tendencies, which are allowed to come to the surface on these occasions. Besides, each one will quite naturally choose from among these masks, without being fully aware of it, the one that best suits him, that is, the one which represents what is most in conformity with his own lower tendencies–so much so that one could say that the mask which is supposed to hide the true face of the individual, on the contrary reveals to the eyes of everyone that which he really carries within himself but which he is habitually obliged to dissimulate. It is well to note, for this throws further light on the masks, that we have here a kind of parody of the 'reversal' which, as we have explained elsewhere,[11] takes place at a certain degree of initiatic development; a parody, we say, and a truly satanic counterfeit, for here the reversal is an exteriorization, not of the beings spirituality but, on the contrary, of its lowest possibilities.[12]

10. At the end of the Middle Ages, when the grotesque festivals of which we have spoken were suppressed or ceased to be held, there resulted an expansion of sorcery out of all proportion with what had been seen in previous centuries. These two facts are by no means unconnected although this connection is not generally noticed, which is all the more surprising in that there are several quite striking resemblances between such festivals and the 'witch's sabbath', where everything is done 'in reverse'.

11. See 'L'Esprit est-il dans le corps ou le corps dans l'esprit?' [in *Initiation et réalisation spirituelle*, ch. 30].

12. In some traditional civilisations there were also special periods when, for analogous reasons, 'wandering influences' were allowed to manifest themselves freely, all due precautions having been taken. These influences naturally correspond in the cosmic order to what the lower psychism is in the human being; and consequently between their manifestation and that of spiritual influences there is the same inverse relationship as between the two kinds of exteriorization we have just mentioned. Moreover, in these conditions it is not difficult to understand that the masquerade itself seems in a way to represent an apparition of 'larvas' or of malefic spectres. ['... there is here, in fact, a certain similarity with the "exhaustion of lower possibilities", but in this case the "exhaustion" takes place as it were collectively' (letter from the author, 18 December 1945, to Michel Vālsan). On the question of 'exhaustion' cf., *L'Esoterisme de Dante*, ch. 6, 'Les trois mondes' and *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, ch. 26, 'De la mort initiatique'.]

To end this survey, we will add that if the festivals of this kind are more and more rare and if they even seem hardly able any longer to arouse the interest of the crowd, it is because, in a time such as our own, they have become truly pointless.[13] In fact, how can there still be any question of 'circumscribing' disorder and of containing it within rigorously defined limits, when it has spread everywhere and is manifested constantly in all domains of human activity? Thus although, considering only externals and from a purely 'aesthetic' point of view, one might be tempted to welcome, on account of their inevitable garb of ugliness, the almost complete disappearance of these festivals, this disappearance can on the contrary be seen, by going to the roots of the matter, as an exceedingly unreassuring symptom, because it bears witness to the irruption of disorder into the whole course of existence and to its having become generalised to such a point that we could really be said to live in a sinister 'perpetual carnival'.

24 § Some Aspects of the Symbolism of the Fish

THE symbolism of the fish, which is to be found in numerous traditional forms, including Christianity, is exceedingly complex and has many aspects which need to be clearly distinguished one from another. As to the earliest origins of this symbol, it seems to be of Nordic or even Hyperborean provenance. Its presence has in fact been verified in North Germany and in Scandinavia,[1] and in these regions it is in all likelihood nearer its starting-point than in Central Asia where doubtless it was brought by the great current which, issuing directly from the Primordial Tradition, was later to give birth to the doctrines of India and Persia. It is to be noted moreover, generally speaking, that certain aquatic animals figure above all in the symbolism of Northern peoples: to give just one example, the octopus is particularly widespread among the Scandinavians and the Celts, and is also found in archaic Greece as one of the chief motifs in Mycenian ornamentation.[2]

13. That amounts to saying that there are no longer, strictly speaking, anything but superstitions, in the etymological sense of this word.

1. Cf., L Charbonneau-Lassay, 'Le Poisson' in *Regnabit*, December 1926.

2. The arms of the octopus are generally straight in the Scandinavian figurations, while they are wound in spirals in Mycenian ornaments. In the latter, one also sees very frequently the *swastika*, or figures that are manifestly derived from it. The symbol of the octopus relates to the zodiacal sign of Cancer, which corresponds to the summer solstice and to the 'depth of the Waters'. It is easy to understand from this that it could sometimes have been taken in a malefic sense, the summer solstice being the *Janua Inferni*.

Another fact which bears out these considerations is that in India the manifestation in the form of the fish (*Matsya-avatāra*) is held to be the first of all the manifestations of *Vishnu*,[3] the one which marks the very beginning of the present cycle, and that it is thus directly related to the starting-point of the Primordial Tradition. It must not be forgotten, in this connection, that Vishnu represents the divine Principle especially in its world-preserving aspect. This function comes very close to that of Saviour, which is, more precisely, a particular instance of the wider function of Preserver; and it is truly as Saviour that *Vishnu* appears in some of his manifestations which correspond to phases of crisis in the history of the world.[4] Now the idea of the Saviour is also explicitly attached to the Christian symbolism of the fish, for the last letter of the Greek *Ichthus* is interpreted as the initial of *Soter*.[5] Doubtless there is nothing surprising in this, seeing that it has to do with Christ; but there are none the less emblems which allude more directly to certain of his other attributes, and which do not formally express the function of 'Saviour'.

In the form of the fish, at the end of the *Mahā-Yuga* which precedes our own, *Vishnu* appears to *Satyavrata*[6] who is to become, under the name *Vaivasvata*,[7] the *Manu* or Legislator of the present cycle. He announces to him that the world is going to be destroyed by flood, and he orders him to construct an ark in which the seeds of the future world are to be enclosed. Then, in this very same form, he himself guides the ark over the waters during the cataclysm; and this representation of the ark guided by the divine fish is all the more remarkable for having its equivalent also in Christian symbolism.[8]

3. We must call attention to the fact that we do not say 'incarnations', as is commonly done in the West, for the word is quite inexact. The proper sense of the word *avatāra* is 'descent' of the divine Principle into the manifested world.

4. Let us also note in this connection that the last manifestation, the *Kalki-avatāra*, 'He who is mounted on the white horse', and who must come at the end of this cycle, is described in the *Purānas* in terms rigorously identical to those found in the *Apocalypse*, where they relate to the 'second coming' of Christ.

5. When the fish is taken as the symbol of Christ, its Greek name, *Ichthus*, is considered as formed by the initial letters of the words *Iesous Christos Theou Uios Soter* (Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour).

6. This names signifies, literally, 'dedicated to the Truth'; and this idea of the 'Truth' is to be found in the designation of *Satya-Yuga*, the first of the four ages into which the *Mahā-Yuga* is divided. One may note also the similarity of the word *Satya* with the name Saturn, considered in Western antiquity precisely as the regent of the Golden Age; and in the Hindu tradition, the sphere of Saturn is called *Satya-Loka*.

7. Issued from *Vivasvat*, one of the twelve *Ādityas* who are regarded as so many forms of the Sun, in correspondence with the twelve signs of the Zodiac, and of whom it is said that they must appear simultaneously at the end of the cycle.

8. Charbonneau-Lassay, in the study mentioned above, cites 'the pontifical ornament decorated with embroidered figures which enclose the remains of the Lombard bishop of the eighth or ninth century, and on which is seen a barque carried by a fish, image of Christ supporting the Church'. Now, the ark has often been regarded as a figure of the Church, just as the barque (which, in ancient times was, with the keys, one of the emblems of Janus; cf., *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporelle*, ch. 8). It is this one and the same idea that we find expressed here both in Hindu and Christian symbolism.

The *Matsya-avatāra* has yet another aspect which is particularly worthy of note: after the cataclysm, that is at the beginning of the present *Maha-Yuga*, he brings mankind the *Veda*, which must be understood, according to the etymological signification of the word (derived from the root *vid*, to know), as the Science of sciences, or Sacred Knowledge in its entirety. This is a very clear allusion to the primordial Revelation, or to the 'non-human' origin of Tradition. It is said that the *Veda* subsists perpetually, being in itself prior to all the worlds; but it is as if hidden or enveloped during the cosmic cataclysms which separate the different cycles, after which it must be manifested anew. The affirmation of the perpetuity of the *Veda*, moreover, is directly related to the cosmological theory of the primordiality of sound among the sensible qualities (as the quality that belongs to ether, *ākāsha*, which is the first of the elements).[9] And this theory is ultimately the same as what other traditions express in speaking of creation by the Word. The primordial sound is this Divine Word by which, according to the first chapter of the Hebrew *Genesis*, all things have been made.[10] This is why it is said that the *Rishis* or the Sages of the earliest times 'heard' the *Veda*. Revelation, being like creation itself a work of the Word, is strictly speaking an 'audition' for him who receives it; and the term which denotes it is *shruti*, which means literally 'that which is heard'.[11]

During the cataclysm that separates this *Mahā-Yuga* from the previous one, the *Veda* was enclosed in a state of envelopment in the conch (*shankha*), which is one of the chief attributes of *Vishnu*. The conch is in fact held to contain the imperishable primordial sound (*akshara*), that is the monosyllable *Om*, which is *par excellence* the name of the manifested Word in the three worlds while being at the same time, by another correspondence of its three elements or *mātrās*, the essence of the triple *Veda*.[12]

Like *Vishnu* in India–and also under the form of a fish–the Chaldean *Oannès* (whom some have regarded expressly as a figure of the Christ)[13] also teaches the primordial doctrine to men, a striking example of the unity existing between traditions that are in appearance most different–a unity which would remain inexplicable if we did not admit their derivation from a common source. The symbolism of *Oannès* or of *Dagon* seems moreover to be

9. Inversely, when a man is dying, the first of the senses to be 'lost' or reabsorbed is normally the sense of smell corresponding to the element earth, then taste corresponding to water, then sight corresponding to fire, then touch corresponding to air, and finally hearing which corresponds, as we have seen, to ether. Cf., our study of 'La Théorie hindoue des cinq éléments', in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, August–September, 1935. [We have enlarged this note by giving the relevant gist of the above article which is now not easy to obtain. Ed.]

10. Cf., also the beginning of the Gospel according to St John.

11. On the distinction between *shruti* and *smriti* and on their relationships, see *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 1.

12. On the presence of this same ideogram *AVM* in ancient Christian symbolism, cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 4.

13. In this connection it is interesting to note that the head of the fish, which gave its form to the head-dress of the priests of *Oannès*, is also the form of the mitre of Christian bishops.

not only that of the fish in general, but to be connected more especially with that of the dolphin which with the Greeks was related to the cult of Apollo[14] and had given its name to Delphi; and it is very significant that it was formally recognised that this cult came from the Hyperboreans. The connection between Oannès and the dolphin (which, on the contrary, is not specifically indicated in the manifestation of *Vishnu*), is above all implicit in the close connection between the symbol of the dolphin and that of the 'Woman of the sea' (*Aphrodite Anadyomene* of the Greeks).[15] It is she, under diverse names such as *Ishtar*, *Atergatis* and *Dercéto*, who appears as the consort of *Oannés* or of his equivalents, that is, as a complementary aspect of the same principle, its Shakti,[16] as the Hindu tradition would call her. This is the 'Lady of the Lotus' (*Ishtar*, like Esther in Hebrew, means 'lotus', and sometimes also 'lily', two flowers which often replace one another in symbolism),[17] like the *Kwan-yin* of the Far East, who in one of her forms is also the 'Goddess of the depths of the sea'.

To complete these remarks, we will add that the figure of the Babylonian *Ea*, the 'Lord of the Deep', represented as half-goat and half-fish,[18], is identical with that of the sign Capricorn in the Zodiac and may even have been its prototype. Now it is important to recall in this respect that in the annual cycle the sign of Capricorn corresponds to the winter solstice. The *Makara* which, in the Hindu zodiac, takes the place of Capricorn, is not unlike the dolphin. The symbolic opposition between the dolphin and the octopus must therefore be brought back to the opposition of the two solstitial signs of Capricorn and Cancer (in India Cancer is represented by the crab) or the Gates of Heaven and Hell, *Janua Cœli* and *Janua Inferni*;[19] and this also explains why these same two animals are found associated in certain cases, for example under the tripod of Delphi and under the feet of the coursers that draw the solar chariot, as indicating the two extreme points reached

14. It is this which explains the connection of the dolphin symbol with the idea of light (cf., L Charbonneau-Lassay, 'Le Dauphin et le crustacé' in *Regnabit*, January 1927, and in *Bestiaire du Christ*, ch. 98, 5). Also to be noted is the function attributed by the ancients to the dolphin as saviour of the shipwrecked, of which the legend of Arion offers one of the best known examples.

15. This 'Woman of the sea' must not be confused with the mermaid, though she may sometimes be represented by a similar form.

16. The *Dea Syra* is strictly speaking the 'solar Goddess', just as the primeval Syria is the 'Land of the Sun', as we have already explained, its name being identical with *Sūrya*, the Sanskrit name for the Sun.

17. In Hebrew, the two names *Esther* and *Sushana* have the same meaning and, moreover, they are numerically equivalent: both add up to 661, and the additions before each of them, of the letter *he*, which signifies the definite article of which the value is 5, brings the number to 666, from which some have not failed to draw more or less fantastic deductions; for our part, we mention this only as a mere curiosity.

18. Moreover *Ea* holds before him–like the Egyptian scarab–a ball which represents the World Egg.

19. The function of the dolphin as guide of sanctified souls towards the 'Islands of the Blessed' also refers obviously to the *Janua Cœli*.

by the Sun in its annual march. It is important not to confuse the two signs in question with another sign, that of Pisces, the symbolism of which is different and must be related exclusively to that of the fish in general, especially in its connection with the idea of the 'principle of life' and of 'fertility; (above all in the spiritual sense, like 'posterity' in the traditional language of the Far East). These are other aspects which can likewise be related to the Word, but which must none the less be distinguished clearly from those which manifest it, as we have seen, under its two attributes of Revealer and Saviour.

25 § The Mysteries of the Letter *Nūn*

NUN is the fourteenth letter of both the Arabic and the Hebrew alphabets and it has the numerical value of 50. It holds however a more particularly significant place in the Arabic alphabet of which it terminates the first half, the total number of letters being 28 instead of the 22 of the Hebrew alphabet. As for its symbolic correspondences, this letter is considered above all, in the Islamic tradition, as representing *al-Ḥūt*, the whale; and this accords with the original meaning of the word *nūn* itself which designates the whale and which also signifies 'fish'. It is by reason of this signification that *Sayyidnā Yūnus* (the prophet Jonah) is called *Dhūn-Nūn*. This is naturally related to the general symbolism of the fish and more especially to some of those aspects that we considered in the last chapter, in particular, as we shall see, that of the 'fish-saviour', be this the *Matsya-avatāra* of the Hindu tradition or the *Ichthus* of the first Christians. The whale also plays the same part in this respect as is played elsewhere by the dolphin, and, like the dolphin it corresponds to the zodiacal sign of Capricorn as the solstitial gate that gives access to the 'ascending way'. But its similarity with the *Matsya-avatāra* is perhaps the most striking as is shown by the considerations drawn from the form of the letter *nūn*, especially if they are related to the Biblical history of the prophet Jonah.

To understand the question clearly, it must be remembered first of all that *Vishnu*, manifesting himself in the form of the fish (*Matsya*), orders Satyavrata, the future *Manu* Vaivasvata, to construct the ark in which the seeds of the future world are to be enclosed, and that under the same form he then guides the ark over the waters during the cataclysm that marks the separation of the two successive *Mahā-Yugas*. The function of Satyavrata here is similar to that of *Sayyidnā Nūḥ* (Noah), whose ark likewise contains the elements which will serve for the restoration of the world after the flood. No matter that the application which is made of this may be different, in the sense that the Biblical deluge in its most immediate signification seems to

mark the beginning of a more restricted cycle than the *Mahā-Yuga*; though not the same event, they are at least two analogous events, wherein the previous state of the world is destroyed in order to be replaced by a new state.[1] If we now compare with this the story of Jonah, we see that the whale, instead of simply playing the part of the fish-guide of the ark, is really identified with the ark itself. In fact, Jonah remains enclosed in the body of the whale, like Satyavrata and Noah in the ark, during a period that is also for him, if not for the outer world, a period of obscuration corresponding to the interval between two states or two modalities of existence. Here, too, the difference is only secondary, the same symbolic figures in fact always being susceptible of a double application, macrocosmic and microcosmic. Moreover, Jonah's emergence from the belly of the whale has always been regarded as a symbol of resurrection and therefore of passage to a new state; and this must be compared, on the other hand, with the idea of 'birth' which, in the Hebrew Kabbala especially, is attached to the letter *nūn* and which must be understood spiritually as a 'new birth', that is, a regeneration of the being, individual or cosmic.

This is what the form of the Arabic letter *nūn* indicates very clearly: this letter consists of the lower half of a circumference and a point that is the centre of this same circumference. Now the lower half-circumference is also the figure of an ark floating on the waters, and the point within it represents the seed enveloped or contained therein. The central position of this point shows, moreover, that in reality it is a question of the 'seed of immortality', or indestructible 'kernel' which escapes all the outward dissolutions. It may be noted, too, that the half-circumference, with its convexity turned downwards, is a schematic equivalent of the cup, like which it thus has, so to speak, the significance of a 'matrix' in which the not-yet-developed seed is enclosed and which, as we shall see in what follows, is to be identified with the lower or 'terrestrial' half of the World Egg.[2] Under this aspect of the 'passive' element of spiritual transmutation, *al-Ḥūt* is also in a certain manner the representation of every individuality insofar as it carries the 'seed of immortality' in its centre, which is symbolically represented as the heart; and in this connection, we can recall the close relationship, which we have already expounded on other occasions, of the symbolism of the heart with that of the cup, and with that of the 'World Egg'. The development of the spiritual seed implies that the being leaves its individual state and the cosmic setting to which it belongs, just as it is in coming out of the body of the whale that Jonah is 'revived'; and in view of what we have already written on the subject,[3] it will easily be understood that this emergence is the equivalent of issuing forth from the initiatic cave, the very concavity of which is also represented by that of the half-circumference of the *nun*. The new birth necessarily presupposes death to the former state, whether it be an individual or a world that is in question. Death

1. Cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 11.

2. By a curious parallel, this sense of 'matrix' (the Sanskrit *yoni*) is also implied in the Greek word *delphis*, which is at the same time the name of the dolphin.

3. [See below, ch. 36].

and birth or resurrection—here we have two aspects that are inseparable one from another, for they are in reality nothing other than the two opposite faces of one same change of state. *Nun* in the alphabet immediately follows *mīm*, which has among its principal significations that of death (*al-mawt*), and whose form[4] represents the being completely folded up in himself, reduced in a way to a pure virtuality, to which the position of prostration corresponds ritually. But by the concentration of all the essential possibilities of the being in one-single indestructible point, this virtuality, which may seem a transitory annihilation, immediately becomes the very seed from which will sprout forth all its developments in the higher states.

It should be added that the symbolism of the whale has not only a benefic aspect, but also a malefic one which, apart from general considerations related to the double meaning of symbols, is further and more especially justified by its connection both with death and with resurrection, under the guise of which every change of state appears according to whether it is viewed from the one side or the other, that is, in relation to the previous state or to the state which is to come. The cave is both a place of burial and a place of rebirth, and in the story of Jonah the whale plays precisely this double part. Besides, cannot one say that the *Matsya-avatāra* himself appeared first in the baneful guise of harbinger of a cataclysm before becoming the saviour in this very cataclysm? On the other hand, the malefic aspect of the whale is manifestly akin to the Hebrew *Leviathan*.[5] But it is especially represented in the Arab tradition by the 'daughters of the whale' (*banāt al-Ḥūt*) who from the astrological point of view are the equivalents of *Rāhn* and *Kētu* in the Hindu tradition, especially insofar as concerns the eclipses, and who, it is said, 'will drink the sea' on the last day of the cycle, on that day when 'the stars will arise in the West and will set in the East'. We cannot insist further on this point without altogether digressing from our subject; but we must at least call attention to the fact that one finds again here an immediate connection with the end of the cycle and the change of state which follows, for this is very significant and brings added confirmation to what we have been saying.

Let us now return to the form of the letter *nūn*, which gives rise to a remark that is important from the point of view of the relations existing between the alphabets of different traditional languages. In the Sanskrit alphabet, the corresponding letter *na*, reduced to its fundamental geometrical elements,[6]

4. [The letter *mīm* is like a small loop in a cord with just enough of the cord left to join it to other letters, on one side or on both sides as the case may be. Ed.]

5. The Hindu *Makara*, which is likewise a marine monster, has primarily the 'benefic' significance that is attached to the sign of Capricorn, the place of which it holds in the Hindu Zodiac; but it none the less has, in many of its figurations, features which recall the 'typhonian' symbolism of the crocodile.

6. [On analogy with what the author said to me about the 'geometrical hieroglyph' of *Om* (see p. 95, note 5), he is evidently referring here to a form of letter which is likewise not to be found among the alphabets now used in Hinduism. But in the already mentioned astral alphabet *Watan* (see p. 97, note 10), which was known to the Brahmins and which may well have influenced the development of the Sanskrit script at an early stage, the nasal letter had the form ◠. Ed.]

is likewise composed of a half-circumference and a point; but here, the convexity being turned upwards, it is the upper half of the circumference and not the lower half as in the Arabic *nūn*. It is therefore the same figure but inverted or, more exactly, two figures that are strictly complementary to one another. If they are joined together, the two central points naturally merge into one, and this gives a circle with the point at the centre, a figure which represents the complete cycle and which is at the same time the symbol of the Sun in astrology and that of gold in alchemy.[7] Just as the lower half-circumference is the figure of the ark, the upper half-circumference is, as we have seen, that of the rainbow which is its analogue in the strictest acceptance of the word, all true analogy being inverse. These two semicircles are also the two halves of the 'World Egg', the one terrestrial, in the lower waters, and the other celestial, in the upper waters; and the circular figure, which was complete at the beginning of the cycle, before the separation of the two halves, must be reconstituted at the end of the same cycle.[8] It could be said, therefore, that the reunion of the two figures in question represents the completion of the cycle, by the joining of its beginning and its end, and reference to solar symbolism makes this all the clearer inasmuch as the figure of the Sanskrit *na* corresponds to the rising Sun and that of the Arabic *nūn* to the setting Sun. On the other hand, the complete circular figure is also the usual symbol of the number 10, the centre being 1 and the circumference 9. But here, being obtained by the union of the two *nūn*, it equals $2 \times 50 = 100 = 10^2$, which indicates[9] that it is in the 'intermediary world' that the junction must be brought about. In fact, this junction is impossible in the lower world, which is the domain of division and separativity, whereas, on the contrary, it always exists in the upper world where it is realised principially in permanent and immutable mode in the eternal present.

To these already lengthy remarks, we will make just one addition so as to connect them with a question which was recently alluded to in this very journal.[10] It follows from what we have been saying that the fulfilment of

7. This recalls the symbolism of the 'Spiritual Sun' and the 'Golden Embryo' (*Hiranyagarbha*) in the Hindu tradition; moreover, according to certain correspondences, the letter *nūn* is the planetary letter of the Sun.

8. Cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 11.

9. [The author evidently expects the reader to understand that the raising of a number to a higher power signifies the rising from a lower to a higher level. The power of 2 would indicate a transfer to the next higher state, in this case from the corporeal to the psychic. The power of 3 indicates a higher elevation. In Islam 1000 (10^3) is sometimes used to express totality, but within the domain of creation, not beyond it. Ed.]

10. Frithjof Schuon, 'Le Sacrifice', in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, April 1938, p. 137, note 2. [This chapter was first published in *E.T.* a few months after Schuon's article, from which we will quote this passage referred to by Guénon: 'To return to the question of India, one is within one's rights to say that the expansion of an orthodox foreign tradition, Islam, seems to indicate that Hinduism itself no longer possesses the full vitality or actuality of a tradition in integral conformity with the conditions of a given cyclic period. This meeting of Islam, which is the last possibility issuing from the Primordial Tradition, and of Hinduism which is doubtless the most direct branch of that Tradition, is moreover very significant and leads to very complex considerations.']

the cycle, as we have envisaged it, should have a certain correlation in the historical order with the encounter of the two traditional forms that correspond to its beginning and its end, and which have respectively Sanskrit and Arabic for sacred languages—the Hindu tradition insofar as it represents the most direct heritage of the Primordial Tradition, and the Islamic tradition as 'Seal of Prophecy' and therefore the ultimate form of traditional orthodoxy for the present cycle.

26 § The Wild Boar and the Bear

Among the Celts the wild boar and the bear symbolised, respectively, the representatives of the spiritual authority and the temporal power, that is, the two castes of Druids and Knights, the equivalents, at least originally and in their essential attributions, of the Brahmins and Kshatriyas in India. As we have indicated elsewhere,[1] this clearly Hyperborean symbolism is one of the marks of the direct attachment of the Celtic tradition to the Primordial Tradition of the present *Mahā-Yuga*, whatever other elements, from earlier but already secondary and derivative traditions, may have come to be added to this main current and to be, as it were, reabsorbed into it. The point to be made here is that the Celtic tradition could probably be regarded as truly constituting one of the 'links' between the Atlantean tradition and the Hyperborean tradition, after the end of the secondary period when this Atlantean tradition represented the predominant form and, as it were, the 'substitute' for the original centre which was already inaccessible to the bulk of humanity.[2] On this point also, the same symbolism which we have just mentioned can provide some information that is not without interest.

Let us note first of all the importance given to the wild boar by the Hindu tradition, which is itself the direct issue of the Primordial Tradition and which expressly affirms its own Hyperborean origin in the *Veda*. The wild boar (*varāha*) not only figures as the third of the ten *avatāras* of *Vishnu* in the present *Mahā-Yuga*, but our entire *Kalpa*, that is to say, the entire cycle of manifestation of our world is designated in Hinduism as the *Shwētavarāha-Kalpa*, the 'cycle of the white wild boar'. This being so, and considering the analogy which necessarily exists between the great cycle and subordinate cycles, it is natural that the mark of the *Kalpa*, so to speak, should be found once more at the outset of the *Mahā-Yuga*; and this is why the polar 'sacred land', seat of the primordial spiritual centre of this *Mahā-Yuga*, is also called

1. *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel*, ch. 1.

2. Cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 10, especially in connection with the relationships between the Hyperborean *Tula* and the Atlantean *Tula* (*Tula* being one of the primary designations of spiritual centres). See also our article 'Atlantide et Hyperborée' in *Le Voile d'Isis*, October 1929.

Vārāhī or the 'land of the wild boar'.[3] Moreover, since it is there that the first spiritual authority resided, from which all other authority of the same order is only an emanation, it is no less natural that the representatives of such an authority should also have received the symbol of the wild boar as their distinctive mark and that they should have retained it during the times that followed. This is why the Druids designated themselves as 'wild boars' even though, since symbolism always has multiple aspects, we may well have here at the same time an allusion to the isolation in which they kept themselves with regard to the outside world, the wild boar always being thought of as 'solitary'. It must be added, furthermore, that this very isolation, which took the form, with the Celts as with the Hindus, of a forest retreat, is not unrelated to the characteristics of 'primordiality', of which some reflection at least has always had to be maintained in all spiritual authority worthy of the function it fulfils.

But let us return to the name *Vārāhī*, which leads to some particularly important observations: it is considered as an aspect of the *Shakti* of *Vishnu*, more especially in relation to his third descent, the boar *avatāra*, whose 'solar' nature immediately identifies him with the 'solar land' or primeval 'Syria', of which we have spoken elsewhere,[4] and which is, moreover, one of the designations of the Hyperborean *Tula*, that is, of the primordial spiritual centre. Then again, the root *var*, for the name of the wild boar, is found in the Nordic languages under the form *bor*.[5] The exact equivalent of *Vārāhī* therefore is 'Borean', and the truth is that the customary name of 'Hyperborean' was used only by the Greeks at a time when they had already lost the meaning of this ancient designation. It would be better, therefore, in spite of the usage that has prevailed since then, to term the Primordial Tradition not 'Hyperborean' but simply 'Borean', affirming thereby unequivocally its connection with 'Borea' or the 'land of the wild boar'.

Another point to be made is that the root *var* or *vri*, has in Sanskrit the sense of 'cover', 'to protect' and 'to hide'; and as the name *Varuna* and its Greek equivalent *Ouranos* show, it serves to designate the sky, not only because it covers the earth but also because it represents the higher worlds, hidden from the senses.[6] Now, all this applies perfectly to spiritual centres, either because they are hidden from the eyes of the profane or because they protect the world by their invisible influence, or finally because they are, on earth, like images of the celestial world itself. Let us add that the same root has yet another sense, that of 'choice' or 'election' (*vara*), which obviously is no less

3. See further in this connection, 'Atlantide et Hyperborée'. We remarked there that, contrary to what Saint-Yves d'Alveydre seems to have thought, this name of *Vārāhī* in no way applies to Europe which is beyond question the 'Land of the Bull', though no doubt it came to be so called in a period far removed from the origins.

4. See above 'The Science of Letters' [8] and 'The Land of the Sun [14].

5. Whence the English *boar*, and also the German *Eber*.

6. See *The Lord of the World*, ch. 7, where we showed also that the Latin word *coelum* itself originally had the same meaning.

in agreement with the region which is everywhere designated by names such as 'land of the elect', 'land of saints' or 'land of the blessed'.[7]

In what we have just said, the union of the two symbolisms, 'solar' and 'polar', may have been noted; but strictly speaking, as far as the wild boar is concerned, it is the polar aspect that is especially important; and this results from the fact that in ancient times the wild boar represented the constellation which later became the Great Bear [*Ursa Major*].[8] There is, in this substitution of names, one of the signs of what the Celts symbolised precisely by the struggle between the boar and the bear, that is to say the revolt of the representatives of the temporal power against the supremacy of the spiritual authority, with the diverse vicissitudes which followed in the course of the successive historical periods. The first manifestations of this revolt, in fact, go back much further than commonly-known history, and even further back than the beginning of the *Kali-Yuga*, in which it was to become more wide-spread than ever before. This explains how the name of *bor* could have come to be transferred from the wild boar to the bear,[9] and how 'Borea' itself, the 'land of the wild boar' could subsequently become, at a certain moment, 'the land of the bear' during a period of Kshatriya predominance to which, according to the Hindu tradition, *Parashu-Rāma*[10] put an end.

In this same Hindu tradition the most common name of the Great Bear is *sapta-riksha*, and the Sanskrit for bear, *Riksha*, is linguistically identical with the names it is known by in various other languages: the Celtic *arth*, the Greek *arktos*, and even the Latin *ursus*. It may be wondered, however, if that is really the primary meaning of the expression *sapta-riksha*, or if, in accordance with the substitution of which we have just spoken there was not rather a kind of super-position of words etymologically distinct but brought together and even identified by the application of a certain phonetic symbolism. In fact, *riksha*, generally speaking, is also a star, that is, a 'light' (*archis*, from the root *arch* or *ruch*, 'shine' or 'illuminate'), whereas the *sapta-riksha* is the symbolic abode of the seven *Rishis* who, beyond the fact that their name relates to 'vision' and therefore to light, are themselves also the seven 'Lights' by whom the Wisdom of earlier cycles was transmitted to the present cycle.[11]

7. The Germanic root of *ur*, which has the sense of 'primordiality', would also seem to be related to the Sanskrit *var*.

8. It should be born in mind that this constellation has also had many other names, among them that of the scales; but it would be beyond the range of this chapter to deal with it here.

9. In German *Bär*.

10. In this connection, we have already had occasion to note that Fabre d'Olivet and those who followed him like Saint-Yves d'Alveydre seem to have made a rather strange confusion between *Parashu-Rāma* and *Rāma-Chandra*, that is, between the sixth and seventh *avatāras* of *Vishnu*.

11. The persistence of these 'seven Lights' in Masonic symbolism is to be noted; the presence of the same number of persons representing them is necessary for the constitution of a 'right and perfect' lodge as well as for the validity of initiatic transmission. Let us note, too, that the seven stars which are spoken of at the beginning of the Apocalypse (1: 16 and 20) would be, according to certain interpretations, those of the Great Bear.

Nor is this connection between the bear and light the only case of its kind in animal symbolism, for the wolf was held to be connected with light by both Celts and Greeks,[12] whence its attribution to the solar god, Belen or Apollo.

For a certain period, the name *sapta-riksha* was no longer applied to the Great Bear, but to the Pleiads, which likewise comprise seven stars. This transfer from a polar constellation to a zodiacal one corresponds to a passage from a solistitial to an equinoctial symbolism, implying a change in the starting point of the annual cycle as well as in the order of predominance of the cardinal points which are related to the different phases of the cycle.[13] The change here is from North to West, which is indicative of the Atlantean period; and this is clearly confirmed by the fact that, for the Greeks, the Pleiads were daughters of Atlas and as such were also called Atlantids. Moreover, transfers of this kind are often the cause of multiple confusions, the same names having received different applications at different periods and this applies to terrestrial regions as well as to the heavenly constellations, so that it is not always easy to determine exactly what they refer to in each case. Nor indeed is it possible to do so, except by linking their diverse 'localisations' to the characteristics that belong to the corresponding traditional forms, as we have just done for those of the *sapta-riksha*.

With the Greeks, the revolt of the Kshatriyas was represented by the hunting of the wild boar of Calydon, a transparently Kshatriya version of the struggle according to which they claim for themselves decisive victory, since the boar is killed by them. Athenaeus, following earlier authors, reports that the boar of Calydon was white,[14] which clearly identifies him with the *Shwēta-varāha* of the Hindu tradition.[15] What is no less significant, from our point of view, is that the first blow was struck by Atalanta who, it is said, had been suckled by a bear; and the presence of her name in this context might indicate that the revolt had its beginning in Atlantis itself, or at least among the heirs of its tradition.[16] As to the name of Calydon, it is to be found precisely in *Caledonia* the ancient name of Scotland: apart from any question of a particular 'localisation', it is precisely the country of the 'Kaldes' or Celts;[17] and the forest of Calydon is no different from that of Broceliande, the name of which is again the same, though in a somewhat modified form and preceded by the word *bro* or *bor*, that is the very name of the wild boar.

12. In Greek, the 'wolf' is *lukos* and the light is *luke*; hence the epithet *Lycius* (Lycian), with its two meanings, which is applied to Apollo.

13. The transfer of the Scales into the Zodiac naturally has a similar meaning.

14. *Deipnosophistarum*, 9: 13.

15. It is hardly necessary to recall that white is also the colour attributed symbolically to spiritual authority, and it is also known that the Druids, in particular, wore white garments.

16. There are also other curious parallels in this respect, as for example between the golden apples of the legend of Atalanta and those of the garden of the Hesperides or 'daughters of the West', who were also daughters of Atlas, as were the Pleiads.

17. It is moreover probable that the name Celts, like Chaldeans which is identical with it, was not originally the name of a particular people, but that of a sacerdotal caste exercising spiritual authority among different peoples.

The fact that the bear is often taken symbolically in its feminine aspect, as we have just seen in the myth of Atalanta, and as is seen also in the denominations *Ursa Major* and *Ursa Minor*, is also significant, for several reasons, in respect of its attribution to the warrior caste, custodians of the temporal power. In the first place, this caste normally has a 'receptive', or feminine part to play in its relationship with the sacerdotal caste; from which it receives not only the teaching of the traditional doctrine but also the legitimation of its own power, whence, strictly speaking, its 'divine right'. Then, when this same warrior caste, reversing the normal relationships of subordination, claims supremacy, its predominance is generally accompanied by that of feminine elements in the symbolism of the traditional form modified by it; and sometimes, even, as a consequence of this modification, also by the institution of a feminine form of priesthood, such as that of the Celtic druidesses, for example. This last point is merely touched on here, since to dwell on it would lead us too far afield, especially if we wished to search elsewhere for corresponding examples. But we have at least said enough to show why it is the female bear rather than the male that is symbolically placed in opposition to the wild boar.

It should be added that the two symbols of the boar and the bear do not always appear in opposition or struggle, but that in certain cases they may represent the spiritual authority and the temporal power (or the two castes of Druids and Knights) in their normal and harmonious relationships as may be seen for example in the legend of Merlin and Arthur. In fact, Merlin, the Druid, is also the boar of the forest of Broceliande, where he ends, moreover, not by being killed like the boar of Calydon, but only by being put to sleep by a feminine power; and King Arthur bears a name derived from that of the bear, *arth*.[18] More precisely, this name is identical with that of the star *Arcturus*, taking into account the slight difference that is due to their respectively Celtic and Greek derivations. This star is in the constellation of the Waggoner[19] and by these names one can again see reunited the marks of two different periods, the 'guardian of the Bear' becomes the Waggoner when the Bear herself, or the *sapta-riksha*, has become the *septum triones* that is to say, the 'seven oxen' (whence the appelation of 'Septentrion' to designate the North); but we are not concerned here with these transformations which are relatively recent in relation to what we are considering.[20]

All that has been said so far seems to point to the following conclusion as

18. In Scotland one finds the family name Macarthy (*Mac-Arth* or 'son of the bear') which evidently indicates appurtenance to a warrior clan.

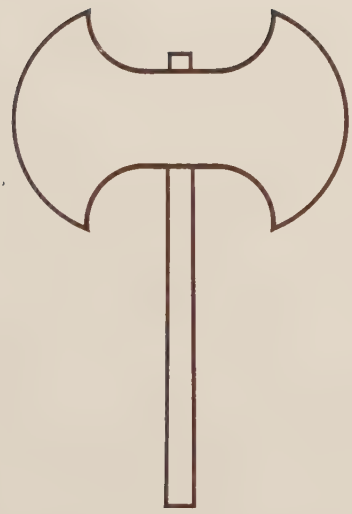
19. [French, *Bouvier* (ox-drover); Latin, *Auriga* (charioteer). Tr.]

20. Arthur is the son of Uther Pendragon, the 'chief of the five', that is to say the paramount king who resides in the fifth kingdom, that of *Mide* or of the 'midst', situated at the centre of the four subordinate kingdoms at the four cardinal points (see *The Lord of the World* ch. 9); and this situation is comparable to that of the celestial Dragon when, containing the pole-star, he was 'in the middle of heaven as a king upon his throne', according to the *Sepher Ietsirah*. Cf., 'The Land of the Sun', [14 above.].

regards the respective parts played by the two currents that contributed to the formation of the Celtic tradition: at the beginning the spiritual authority and the temporal power were not separated as two differentiated functions, but were united in their common principle; and a vestige of this is still to be found in the very name of the Druids (*dru-vid*, 'strength-wisdom', these two terms being symbolised by the oak and the mistletoe).[21] In this respect, and also insofar as they represented more particularly the spiritual authority which has sole charge of the higher part of the doctrine, they were the true heirs of the Primordial Tradition; and the essentially 'borean' symbol, that of the wild boar, pertained to them in their own right. As for the Knights, whose symbol was the bear (or the she-bear of Atalanta), it would seem that the part of the tradition more especially destined for them comprised above all elements proceeding from the Atlantean tradition; and this distinction might even help to explain certain more or less enigmatic points of the later history of the Western traditions.

21. For the ancient Egyptians the symbol of the Sphinx, in one of its meanings, combined these two attributes according to their normal relationship. The human head may be considered as representing wisdom and the leonine body as representing strength; the head is the spiritual authority which directs, and the body is the strength which acts. *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel*, ch. 4.

Some Symbolic Weapons



27 § Thunderbolts

In an article published in the special number of *Le Voile d'Isis* devoted to the Tarot, Auriger, speaking of arcanum XVI, has written: 'It seems that a relationship exists between the hail of stones which surround the thunderstruck Tower and the word Beth-el, dwelling place of the Divine, from which 'baetyl' is derived, a word by which the Semites designated meteorites or 'thunderstones'. This connection was suggested by the name 'House of God' given to this arcanum and which is in fact the literal translation of the Hebrew *Beth-el*. But it seems to us that there is confusion here between several quite different things, and that a restatement of this question might be of interest.

First of all, it is certain that the symbolic function of meteorites or stones fallen from heaven is very important, because these are the 'black stones' that feature in so many different traditions, from the stone which represented Cybele or the 'Great Goddess' to the stone which is enshrined in the *Kaʾbah* at Mecca and which plays a part in the story of Abraham. At Rome, too, there was the *lapis niger*, not to mention the sacred shields of the Salians that are said to have been hewn from a meteorite in the time of Numa.[1] These 'black stones' are certainly to be counted as baetyls, that is, stones considered as 'dwelling places of the Divine' or, in other words, as the vehicles of certain 'spiritual influences'. But do all baetyls have this provenance? We think not, and in particular, we see nothing to justify the supposition that such was the case with the stone to which Jacob, according to the *Genesis* account, gave the name of *Beth-el*, a name applied by extension to the place itself where he had had his vision while his head was resting on the stone.

The baetyl strictly speaking represents the *Omphalos*, and as such it is a symbol of the Centre of the World, which quite naturally is identified with the 'dwelling place of God'.[2] This stone took different forms, such as, for example, that of a pillar. It is thus that Jacob says: 'And this stone which I have erected as a pillar, shall be the house of God' [Genesis 28, 22]. Among

1. Ossendowski has told the story of a 'black stone' which was sent of old by the 'King of the World' to the Dalai Lama, then carried to Ourga in Mongolia, and which disappeared a century ago. Not knowing what it was, he sought to explain certain phenomena, such as the appearance of characters on the surface of the stone, by supposing that it was a kind of slate.

2. This designation of 'dwelling place of God', in Hebrew, *mishkan*, was also given later to the Tabernacle. As the word itself indicates, it is the abode of the *Shekinah*.

the Celtic peoples too, certain menhirs, if not all, had the same significance. The Omphalos could also be represented by a stone of conical shape, like the 'black stone' of Cybele, or egg-shaped. The cone recalled the sacred Mountain, symbol of the 'Pole' or of the World Axis; the ovoid form is directly related to another very important symbol, that of the 'World Egg'. In all cases, the baetyl was a 'prophetic stone', a 'stone which speaks', that is, a stone which yielded oracles, or near to which oracles were given, thanks to the spiritual influences of which it was the vehicle. The example of the *Omphalos* of Delphi is very characteristic in this respect.

The baetyls are therefore essentially sacred stones, but were not all of celestial origin. Nevertheless, it is perhaps true, symbolically at least, that the idea of a 'stone fallen from heaven' could be applied to them in a certain sense. What makes us think so is their relationship with the mysterious *luz* of the Hebrew tradition. This relationship certainly exists in the case of the 'black stones', which in fact are aeroliths, but it must not be limited to them alone, for it is said in Genesis that the first name of the *Beth-el* of Jacob was, precisely, *Luz*. We may even recall at this point that the Grail was said to have been carved from a stone which also had fallen from heaven, and all these cases are very closely related, but we will not dwell any more on this, for fear of being led much too far from our subject.[3]

In fact, whether it is a question of baetyls in general, or of 'black stones' in particular, neither the one nor the other really have anything in common with 'thunderbolts'; and it is on this point in particular that the remark we quoted at the outset is gravely mistaken, with a mistake which can be easily explained. It is indeed tempting to suppose that 'lightning stones' or 'thunder stones' must be stones fallen from heaven, aeroliths, but in reality they are not. We could never have guessed what they are without having learned the truth from the peasants who, through their oral tradition, have retained the memory of it. Moreover, these peasants themselves are mistaken in their interpretation, that is, in their belief that the stones have fallen with the lightning or that they are lightning itself, which shows that the true sense of the tradition eludes them. They say, in fact, that thunder falls in two ways, 'in fire' or 'in stone'. In the first case it sets fire, while in the second it only shatters; but they know the 'thunder stones' very well, and they are mistaken only in attributing to them, because of their name, a celestial origin which they do not have and never had.

The truth is that the 'lightning stones' are stones which symbolise the lightning. They are nothing other than prehistoric flint axes, just as the 'serpent's egg', the Druid symbol of the World Egg, is in its material form nothing other than the fossil sea-urchin. The stone axe is the stone which shatters and splits, and this is why it represents the lightning bolt. This symbolism, furthermore, goes back to an extremely remote period and it explains the existence of

3. A more extensive discussion of the question of the *luz* as well as that of the *Omphalos*, is to be found in our study on *The Lord of the World*.

certain axes that archaeologists call 'votive axes', ritual objects that never had a practical use as arms or as implements of any kind.

This leads us quite naturally to recall a point that has already been treated: the stone axe of Parashu-Rāma and the stone hammer of Thor are really one and the same weapon,[4] and that weapon is, moreover, the symbol of the thunderbolt. This 'thunderbolt' symbolism is thus of Hyperborean origin, which means that it belongs to the most ancient of all the traditions of this cycle of humanity, to what is truly the primal tradition for the present *Mahā-Yuga*.[5]

Also to be noted, on the other hand, is the very important part played by the thunderbolt in Tibetan symbolism. The *vajra* which represents it is one of the principal insignia of the dignitaries of Lamaism.[6] At the same time the *vajra* symbolises the masculine principle of universal manifestation, and thus the thunderbolt is associated with the idea of 'divine paternity', an association also to be found quite clearly in Western antiquity inasmuch as the thunderbolt is the principal attribute of *Zeus Pater* or *Ju-piter*, the 'father of gods and men'. Moreover, he destroyed the Titans and the Giants by thunderbolts just as Thor and Parashu-Rāma destroyed their equivalents with weapons of stone.[7]

In connection with this there is, even in the modern West, another parallel which is truly unexpected: Leibniz, in his *Monadologie*, says that 'all created monads are born, so to speak, by continuous *fulgurations* of the Divinity from moment to moment'. Thus, in conformity with the traditional data we have just been discussing, he associates the thunderbolt (French *foudre*, Latin *fulgur*) with the idea of the production of creatures. It is probable that his university commentators never noticed this, any more than they noticed — and how indeed could they? — that the theories of the same philosopher

4. See the article of Patrice Genty on 'Thor and Parashu-Rāma' in *Le Voile d'Isis*, December 1928.

5. Let us note in this connection that by a strange confusion some people today speak of 'Hyperborean Atlantis'. Hyperborea and Atlantis are two distinct regions, just as North and West are two distinct cardinal points; and as starting points for a tradition, the first is considerably prior to the second. We feel all the more justified in calling attention to this in that those who make the mistake in question have seen fit to attribute it to us, whereas it goes without saying that we have never been a party to it, and that we cannot see, in anything that we have written, the least pretext for such an interpretation.

6. *Vajra* is the Sanskrit term which designates the thunderbolt; the Tibetan form of this word is *dorje*.

7. It is interesting that the thunderbolts of Jupiter are forged by Vulcan, which establishes a certain relationship between the 'celestial fire' and the 'subterranean fire', a relationship which is not indicated in cases involving arms of stone. The 'subterranean fire', in fact, had a direct relationship with metallurgical symbolism, especially in the Cabiritic mysteries. Vulcan also forges the weapons of the heroes. It must be added that there exists another Northern version according to which the *Mioelner* or hammer of Thor is of metal and was forged by the dwarfs, who belong to the same order of symbolic entities as the Cabiri, the Cyclops, the Yakshas, etc. Let us note, too, as regards the fire, that the chariot of Thor was drawn by two rams and that in India, the ram is the vehicle of Agni.

on the indestructible 'animal', reduced in miniature, after death, were directly inspired by the Hebrew conception of the *luz* as 'kernel of immortality'.[8]

We will mention one last point which relates to the Masonic symbolism of the mallet. Not only is there an obvious connection between the mallet and the hammer which are, so to speak, two forms of the same tool, but the English Masonic historian R.F. Gould thinks that the 'mallet of the Master' (the symbolism of which he relates to that of the *Tau* because of its form) originates from the hammer of Thor. In addition, the Gauls had a 'God of the mallet' who appears on an old altar discovered at Mayence. It would even seem that this is the *Dis Pater*, whose name is quite close to that of *Zeus Pater*, and whom the Druids, according to Caesar, said was the father of the Gallic race.[9] Thus the mallet appears again as a symbolic equivalent of the *vajra* of the Oriental traditions and so, by a coincidence that is undoubtedly not fortuitous but which will come as a surprise to many, the master Masons have an attribute which has exactly the same meaning as that of the grand Lamas of Tibet; but who in Freemasonry as it exists today could boast of actually possessing the mysterious power, one in its essence though double in its apparently contrary effects, of which this emblem is the sign? We believe that it is not exaggeration to say that, in what still subsists of the initiatic organisations of the West, no one any longer has even a remote idea of what is involved. The symbol remains, but when the 'spirit' has withdrawn it is nothing more than an empty form. Should we continue to hope, in spite of everything, that the day will come when this form will be revived, to respond once again to the reality which is the original point of its existence and which alone confers on it a true initiatic character?

28 § Symbolic Weapons

In speaking of symbolic flowers, we called attention to the lance which, as symbol, figures in the Grail legend as a complement to the cup, and which is one of the many representations of the World Axis.[1] At the same time, we said that this lance is also a symbol of the 'celestial Ray', and in accordance

8. Another point, which we can only indicate in passing, is that *vajra* means both 'thunderbolt' and 'diamond'; this would however lead to further aspects of the question which we are not prepared to treat fully here [see below, 28, 29, and 54.]

9. On certain Gallic coins also there is the figure of an enigmatic personage holding in one hand an object that seems to be a *lituus* or augural wand, and in the other a hammer with which he strikes on a kind of anvil. In view of these attributes the name 'blacksmith Pontiff' has been given to this personage.

1. In this respect the complementarity of the lance and the cup is strictly comparable to that of the mountain and the cave, to which we will return later.

with what we have mentioned elsewhere[2] it is obvious that these two meanings basically coincide. But this also explains why the lance, as well as the sword and the arrow which are its near equivalents, are sometimes assimilated to the solar ray. It goes without saying that these two symbolisms, polar and solar, must never be confused and that, as we have often indicated, polar symbolism is more fundamental and in fact truly primordial; but it is none the less true that what can be called 'transfers' from one to the other frequently occur, for reasons which we may attempt to explain more clearly on some other occasions.[3]

In this connection, we shall for the moment confine ourselves specifically to the attribution of the arrow to Apollo.[4] It is known that with his arrows Apollo killed the serpent *Python*, just as in the Vedic tradition, Indra killed *Ahi* or *Vritra*, the counterpart of *Python*, with the *vajra* which represents the thunderbolt; and this comparison leaves no doubt whatsoever as to the original symbolical equivalence of the two weapons in question. We may also recall the 'golden arrow' of *Abaris* or of *Zalmoxis*, which figures in the history of Pythagoras; and here it can be seen still more clearly that this symbolism is expressly related to the Hyperborean Apollo, which proves the link between his solar and polar aspects.[5]

As to the various weapons that represent the World Axis, it should be noted that they are, not always, but very often, either double-edged or with two points, one at each end. This two-pointedness, as in the case of the *vajra* to which we shall have to return, must clearly be referred back to the duality of the poles, considered as two extremities of the axis, with all the correspondences which this implies and of which we have already spoken elsewhere.[6] In the case of two-edged weapons, the duality lies actually along the axis, so that we must see here a more direct allusion to the two currents that are represented in another way by the two serpents entwined around the staff or the caduceus. But since these two inverse currents are themselves respectively related to the two poles and the two hemispheres, it is immediately obvious that the two symbolisms come together as being in reality one. Fundamentally, then, it is always a question of a double force, single in essence but with apparently opposite effects in its manifestation, resulting from

2. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*.

3. [See ch. 30, below.]

4. [Apollo has been considered as a 'Christ before Christ'; and in early Christianity, one of the names given Christ was 'Chosen Arrow'. Tr.]

5. In this connection, let it be noted that the 'golden thigh' of Pythagoras which made him appear as a kind of manifestation of the Hyperborean Apollo himself, relates to the symbolism of the polar mountain and of *Ursa Major*. On the other hand, the serpent *Python* has an especial connection with Delphi (which was called *Pytho* in ancient times), sanctuary of the Hyperborean Apollo; hence the designation of *Pythoness* [or *Pythia*], and also the name Pythagoras itself, which is really a name of Apollo, 'he who guides the *Pythoness*', that is to say, the inspirer of her oracles.

6. See *The Great Triad*, ch.5.

the polarisation which conditions it, and which also conditions, at different levels, all the degrees and modalities of universal manifestation.[7]

The sword itself may be considered, in general, as a two-edged weapon;[8] but a still more striking example is the double axe, which pertains particularly, though not exclusively, to Aegean and Cretan symbolism, that is, to pre-Hellenic symbolism. Now the axe, as explained in the previous chapter, is quite specifically a symbol of the thunderbolt and as such a strict equivalent of the *vajra*. The comparison of these two weapons thus clearly shows the fundamental identity of the two forms of symbolism we have mentioned, of double-edged weapons and of weapons with two points.[9]

The *vajra* is to be found in many different forms; Ananda Coomaraswamy has shown[10] that the usual form, with a triple point at each end, is thereby closely related to the *trishula* or trident, another very important symbolic weapon, the study of which however would lead us too far from our subject.[11] We will only say that while the median point is at the end of the axis itself, the two lateral points may be related to the above mentioned two currents of the right and of the left; and for this very reason a similar triplicity is to be found elsewhere in axial symbolism—for example, in certain representations of the World Tree. Coomaraswamy has also shown that the *vajra* is traditionally likened to other known symbols of the World Axis such as the axle of the chariot, the two wheels of which correspond to Heaven and Earth; and this explains certain representations of the *vajra* as 'supported' by a lotus on which it is vertically placed. As to the quadruple *vajra*, formed by joining two ordinary *vajras* in the form of a cross, when looked at on the horizontal as its designation *Karma-vajra* suggests, it is very close to such symbols as the *swastika* and the *chakra*.[12] We shall do no

7. This amounts to saying that all cosmic dualities are really only different 'specifications' of the first duality of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*; or, in other terms, of the polarization of Being into *essence* and *substance*.

8. In another of its meanings, the sword is a symbol of the Word, as we shall see in the next chapter. It should also be noted that according to certain ancient historians, the Scythians represented the Divinity by a sword fixed in the earth on the top of a mound. Thus, since the mound is a mountain in miniature, two symbols of the World Axis are here united.

9. The mallet or hammer of Thor, another symbol of the thunderbolt, as we have already noted [*ibid.*] is, in its T shaped form, just like the double axe. It is to be noted also that like the mallet and the sword, though to a lesser extent, the axe is still to be found in contemporary Masonic symbolism.

10. *The Elements of Buddhist Iconography*. [Cam. Mass., 1935.]

11. In this case, the double triplicity of the branches and the roots are even more reminiscent of the two extremities of the *vajra* [on this subject see below, chapter 54, 'The Tree and the *Vajra*']. Again, it is known that the *trishula*, as an attribute of *Shiva*, is often related to the 'triple time' (*trikāla*), that is, to the modalities of time as past, present and future. Further comparisons could be made here with aspects of other traditions, such as certain aspects of the symbolism of *Janus*.

12. Then it is no longer a question, as before, of the vertical axis, but of two horizontal axes of the geometrical figuration explained in *The Symbolism of the Cross*.

more here than call attention to these different points, to which we may have occasion to return in other studies, for the subject is inexhaustible.

Besides the meaning of 'thunderbolt', *vajra* also means 'diamond', which immediately evokes the idea of indivisibility, inalterability and immutability. Immutability is indeed the essential characteristic of the axis around which all things revolve, and which does not itself participate in the revolution. There is yet another very remarkable parallel: Plato describes the World Axis as a luminous axis of diamond which is surrounded by several concentric sheaths of different dimensions and colours, corresponding to the different planetary spheres and moving around the axis.[13] Again, the Buddhist symbolism of the *diamond throne* at the foot of the 'Tree of Wisdom' and at the very centre of the 'wheel of the world', that is, at the one point that always remains immobile, is no less significant in this context.

The thunderbolt, as we have already said, is held to represent a twofold power of production and destruction—'power of life and death' might be thought preferable, though if this is understood only in the literal sense, it would be just another particular application of the power in question.[14] In fact, it is the force which produces all the 'condensations' and 'dissipations' which the Far Eastern tradition attributes to the two complementary principles *yin* and *yang*, corresponding to the two phases of the universal 'exhalation' and 'inhalation',[15] and which are known to Hermetic doctrine as 'coagulation' and 'solution'.[16] The double action of this force is symbolised by the two opposing extremities of the *vajra* considered as a lightning-like weapon, while the diamond clearly represents its single indivisible essence.

Let us note in passing, and as a curiosity—since it can hardly be more than that from our point of view—an application of a much lower order, but one which is nevertheless directly related to the question of symbolic weapons. The 'power of the points', well known in magic and even in secular physics, is actually related to the 'solution' or second aspect of the double power mentioned above. On the other hand, a correspondence with the first aspect or 'coagulation' is to be found in the magical use of knots or 'ligatures'. In this connection we may also remember the symbolism of the 'Gordian knot', severed, significantly, by Alexander with his sword. But here the question

13. *Republic*, 10 (myth of Er the Armenian). Taken all together, these sheaths constitute the 'spindle of Necessity'. Fate, *Clotho*, turns it with the right hand, therefore from right to left, nor is this direction of rotation unimportant, as may be seen from what we have said about the symbolism of the 'double spiral' [cf., *The Great Triad*, ch. 6].

14. In connection with our earlier remarks about the respective weapons of Apollo and Indra, it may be noted that like the thunderbolt, the solar ray is also considered as vivifying or deadly as the case may be. Let us also recall that the lance of the Grail legend as well as the lance of Achilles, to which we have already compared it in this connection, had the double power of inflicting wounds and of healing them.

15. [See again, *The Great Triad*, ch. 6.]

16. It is also what the ancient Greek philosophers termed 'generation' and 'corruption'.

arises of the 'vital knot' which, though related analogically to the previous one, goes far beyond the domain and reach of simple magic.[17]

Finally, mention must be made of another axial symbol which is not, strictly speaking, a weapon, but which is like one in virtue of its pointed end, namely the nail. With the Romans, the nail (*clavus*) and the key (*clavis*)—which their language brought strangely close to each other—are both related to the symbolism of *Janus*.[18] The key, which is itself an axial symbol, leads to other considerations into which we will not enter now. All that can be said here is that the 'power of the keys', or the double power to 'bind' and 'loosen'[19] is not really different from the power of which we have spoken. Fundamentally, what is involved is always a 'coagulation' and a 'solution', in the Hermetic sense of these two terms.

29 § The Sword of Islam (*Sayf al-Islām*)

In the Western world it is customary to consider Islam as essentially a warrior civilisation and, consequently, when the sabre or the sword (*as-sayf*) is in question, this word is taken only in its most literal sense, with no thoughts as to whether anything else is involved. Moreover, although it is not to be contested that there is in Islam a certain warlike aspect, this same aspect, far from being peculiar to Islam, is to be found also in most other traditions, Christianity included. Even without recalling that Christ himself said, 'I came not to bring peace, but a sword',[1] which on the whole can be understood figuratively, the history of Christianity in the Middle Ages, that is, at the time when it was being actually realised in social institutions, gives ample proofs of this. On the other hand, the Hindu tradition itself, which certainly could not pass as particularly warlike, since it is generally reproached for being too little concerned with action, nevertheless contains this aspect also, as we can easily ascertain by reading the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. Short of being

17. We have alluded to this question with reference to the 'sensitive point' of cathedrals in a note entitled 'Cologne ou Strasbourg' in *Le Voile d'Isis*, January 1927 [reprinted in the posthumous collection of the author's essays entitled *Etudes sur la Franc Maçonnerie et le Compagnonage*, ch. 1, Editions Traditionnelles, Paris, 1964].

18. By way of completing this last remark, let us also mention the magic power which is attributed to both these objects and which, apart from all questions of a 'phenomenological' order, would seem to be a kind of exoteric degeneration of their traditional meaning.

19. It may be noted that these words themselves also have an obvious connection with the symbolism of ligatures or knots. All this is closely interrelated, and the various forms in which symbolism is clad are always in perfect agreement.

1. Matthew 10: 34.

blinded by certain prejudices, it is easy to understand that this must be so; for in the social domain war, inasmuch as it is directed against those who create disorder and aims at bringing them back to order, constitutes a legitimate function which is in fact nothing other than an aspect of the function of justice, understood in its most general sense. None the less, this is only the most outward element of the question and therefore the least essential. From the traditional point of view, the great value of war is that it symbolises the fight that man has to make against the enemies he carries within himself, that is, against all those internal elements which are contrary to order and to unity. In both cases, moreover, whether it is the outward social order or the inward spiritual order that is involved, warfare must always be conducive to the establishment of equilibrium and harmony (which explains why it is related to justice) and to unifying thereby in a certain measure the multiplicity of elements that are in opposition with each other. This amounts to saying that the normal outcome of war, and in the final analysis the only point of war, is peace (*as-salām*), which cannot be obtained truly except by submission (*al-islām*) to the divine will, putting each element in its right place in order to make them all unite in the conscious realisation of one and the same plan. There is hardly need to mention how, in the Arabic language, these two terms, *al-islām* and *as-salām*, are closely related to one another.[2]

In the Islamic tradition, these two senses of warfare as well as the real relationship between them, are expressed as clearly as possible by a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, uttered on return from an expedition against outward enemies: 'We have returned from the lesser holy war to the greater holy war' (*Rajaʿnā min al-jihādi l-aṣghar ila l-jihādi l-akbar*). If outer warfare is thus only the 'lesser holy war',[3] while the inner war is the 'greater holy war', it is because the first has only a secondary importance in relation to the second, of which it is merely an outward image. It therefore goes without saying that in these conditions whatever serves for outer warfare can be taken as symbol of what concerns inner warfare,[4] and this is particularly so in the case of the sword.

Those who overlook this meaning, even if they are ignorant of the *ḥadīth* that we have just cited, could at least note that during the sermon, the *khatīb* (preacher), whose function manifestly has nothing martial about it in the ordinary sense of the word, holds in his hand a sword, which in these circumstances can only be a symbol, quite apart from the fact that this sword is usually a wooden one which obviously makes it unfit for use in any ordinary combat, and thereby emphasizes even further its symbolic character.

The wooden sword, moreover, dates back to a very remote past in

2. We have treated these questions more fully in *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 8.

3. It must be added, of course, that this is so only when it is dictated by motives of a traditional order. All other warfare is *ḥarb* and not *jihād*.

4. Naturally, this would no longer be true for the weaponry of modern wars, if only because of its 'mechanical' character, which is incompatible with all true symbolism. It is for a similar reason that the exercise of mechanical trades cannot serve as basis for a development of the spiritual order.

traditional symbolism, for it is, in India, one of the objects that figured in the Vedic sacrifice.[5] This sword (*sphya*), the sacrificial post, the chariot (or more precisely, the axle-tree which is the essential element) and the arrow, are said to be born of the *vajra* or thunderbolt of Indra: 'When Indra hurled the thunderbolt at Vritra, it became, at his hurling of it, fourfold . . .. The Brahmins use two of these four forms during the sacrifice, while the Kshatriyas use the other two in battle[6]. . . When the sacrificer brandishes the wooden sword, it is the thunderbolt that he hurls at the enemy[7] . . .' The relationship of this sword with the *vajra* is to be noted, especially in view of what follows; and in this connection, we will add that the sword is generally assimilated to the lightning or considered as deriving from it.[8] Lightning is represented in sensible form by the well known 'flaming sword', quite apart from other meanings that this may have at the same time, for it must be clearly understood that every true symbol always contains a plurality of meanings which, far from being mutually exclusive or contradictory, harmonise together and complete one another.

The sword of the *khatīb* symbolises above all the power of the word, as should be obvious to anyone, the more so in that this is a meaning generally attributed to the sword, nor is it alien to the Christian tradition either, as these texts of the Apocalypse show: 'And he had in his right hand seven stars; and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and his countenance was as the sun shining in his strength'.[9] 'And out of his mouth[10] goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations . . ..'[11] The sword issuing from the mouth obviously cannot have any other meaning, especially when the being who is thus described in these two passages is none other than the Word himself, or one of his manifestations. As for the sword's two edges, it represents through them a double power of the Word, creative and destructive, which takes us back precisely to the *vajra*. In fact, the *vajra* also symbolises a force which, though one in its essence, is manifested under two aspects that are contrary in appearance though complementary in reality; and these aspects just as they are represented by the two edges of the sword or of other

5. See A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'Le Symbolisme de l'épée', in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, January 1938. The citation which follows is taken from that article.

6. The function of the Brahmins and that of the Kshatriyas may be said to correspond to the inner and outer warfare respectively; or, according to Islamic terminology, to the 'greater holy war' and to the 'lesser holy war'.

7. *Satapatha Brāhmana* 1: 2, 4.

8. In Japan, according to the Shinto tradition, 'the sword is derived from a lightning archetype of which it is the descendent or the hypostasis' (A. K. Coomaraswamy, *ibid*).

9. Apocalypse 1: 16. The union here of polar symbolism (the seven stars of *Ursa Major*, or the *sapta-riksha* of the Hindu tradition) and solar symbolism will be noted; the same union is also to be found, as we shall see, in the traditional significance of the sword itself.

10. The person in question is 'he who was mounted on the white horse', the *Kalki-avatāra* of the Hindu tradition.

11. *Ibid*, 19: 15.

similar weapons,[12] are here represented by the two opposite points of the *vajra*. This symbolism is moreover valid for all the cosmic forces in their entirety, so that its application to speech is only one particular instance; but it is one which, by reason of the traditional conception of the Word and all that it implies, can itself be taken to symbolise inclusively all the other possible applications.[13]

Axial symbolism brings us back to the idea of harmonisation as the goal of holy war, both in its outer and inner meanings, for the axis is the place where all oppositions are reconciled and vanish or, in other words, the place of perfect equilibrium, which the far Eastern tradition designates as the Invariable Mean.[14] Thus, in this respect, which really corresponds to the most profound point of view, the sword represents not only the means, as its most obvious significance might lead us to conclude, but also the very end to be attained, being in a sense, as to its total meaning, a synthesis of both. We have done no more here than bring together a few remarks on this subject, which could be developed at some length; but we think that such as they are, they will serve well enough to show how far from the truth it is to attribute to the sword no more than a 'material' significance, whether it be in the context of Islam or of any other traditional form.

30 § The Symbolism of Horns

IN his study on Celtism,[1] T. Basilide drew attention to the importance of *Apollo Karneios* as god of the Hyperboreans. The Celtic name *Belen* is, furthermore, identical to *Ablun* or *Aplun* which, with the Greeks, became *Apollōn*. We hope someday to write more fully about the Hyperborean Apollo;[2] for the present we will limit ourselves to some reflections on the name *Karneios* in particular, as well as *Kronos* to which it is closely related, for the two names have the same root KRN which expresses essentially the ideas of 'power' and 'elevation'.

In its meaning of 'elevation', the name *Kronos* is perfectly appropriate for Saturn who, in fact, corresponds to the highest of the planetary spheres,

12. Special mention must be made here of the Aegean and Cretan symbol of the double axe. We have already explained that the axe is especially a symbol of the thunderbolt and therefore a strict equivalent of the *vajra* [cf., 27 above].

13. On the double power of the *vajra* and other equivalent symbols (in particular the 'power of the keys') see our treatment in *The Great Triad*, ch. 6.

14. This is also what is represented by the sword positioned vertically along the axis of a balance; taken together, they constitute the symbolic attributes of justice.

1. ['Trois études celtiques', in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, August-September 1936.]

2. [The author had no subsequent occasion to return to this subject.]

the 'seventh heaven' or the *Satya-Loka* of the Hindu tradition.[3] Nor must Saturn be considered as being solely or even primarily a malefic power, which sometimes seems to be the tendency; for it must not be forgotten that he is before all else the regent of the Golden Age, that is, of the *Satya-Yuga* or of the first phase of the *Mahā-Yuga* which coincides precisely with the Hyperborean period,[4] thereby proving that *Kronos* is rightly identified with the god of the Hyperboreans.[5] It is moreover probable that the malefic aspect in this context results from the very disappearance of this Hyperborean world. It is in virtue of an analagous reversal that every 'Land of the Gods', seat of a spiritual centre, becomes a 'Land of the Dead' when this centre has disappeared. It is likewise possible that the dissociation of the two names *Kronos* and *Karneios* which originally were one was an added motive for concentrating this malefic aspect on the name *Kronos*, while the benefic aspect remained attached to the name *Karneios*; and it is also true that the symbolism of the sun has in itself the two opposite aspects, vivifying and death-dealing, productive and destructive, as we have already remarked in connection with weapons that represent the 'solar ray'.[6]

Karneios is the god of the *Karn*, that is, of the 'high place', symbol of the sacred Mountain of the Pole and, for the Celts, represented either by the *tumulus* or by the *cairn* or mound of stones which has retained this name. The stone, moreover, is often directly related to the cult of Apollo as can be seen for example in the *Omphalos* of Delphi as well as in the cubic stone which served as altar at Delos and which the oracle ordered to be doubled in size. On the other hand, the stone also had a particular relationship with *Kronos*; this is a further correspondence which we can only mention in passing, for it deserves separate treatment.[7]

3. For the Pythagoreans, *Kronos* and *Rhea* represented Heaven and Earth respectively; the idea of elevation is therefore found in this correspondence as well. It is only by a later phonetic assimilation that the Greeks identified *Kronos* or Saturn with *Chronos*, Time, although the roots of the two words are really quite different. It seems that the symbol of the scythe may also have been transferred from one to the other at that time, but this does not form part of our present subject.

4. [See William F. Warren, *Paradise Found, the Cradle of the Human Race at the North Pole*. Boston, 1885. Tr.]

5 The sea which surrounded the isle of Ogygia, consecrated to *Karneios* or to *Kronos*, was called the Kronian sea (Plutarch, *De facie in orbe Lunæ*). Ogygia, which Homer [*Odyssey*, 1: 50] called the 'navel of the world' (represented later by the *Omphalos* of Delphi) was only a secondary centre, having replaced *Thule* or primeval Syria at a time much nearer our own than the Hyperborean period.

6. In Greek, the very form of the name *Apollōn* is very near that of *Apollyon*, the 'destroyer' (cf., Apocalypse 9: 11).

7. The 'baetyls', which are comparable to the *Omphalos*, are quite generally given a 'solar' significance; but this must have been superimposed, at a certain period, on a primitive 'polar' meaning as may well have happened in the case of Apollo himself. Let us note further that Apollo is represented as the protector of water-springs (the Celtic *Borvo* was assimilated to him in this respect); and springs are also related to the mountain, or to the stone, which is the equivalent of the mountain in 'polar' symbolism.

At the same time *Karneios* is, as his name indicates, the 'powerful god';[8] and if the mountain in one of its aspects is, in virtue of its stability, a symbol of power as well as of elevation, there is another symbol which is still more characteristic from this point of view, that of horns. Now at Delos, in addition to the cubic stone we have just mentioned, there was another altar called *Keraton* which was made entirely of the horns of bullocks and of goats solidly fitted together. It is obvious that this related directly to *Karneios*, whose symbolic connection with horned beasts has left traces even down to the present day.[9]

The word 'horn' itself is linked with the root KRN, and the same applies to 'crown' which is another symbolic expression of the same ideas, for these two words (in Latin *cornu* and *corona*) are very close to one another.[10] The crown is, needless to say, the emblem of power and the mark of an elevated rank; and an immediate correspondence with horns lies in the fact that both these and the crown are placed on the head, whence inescapably the idea of a 'summit'.[11] But there is still something else to be considered: in more primitive times, the crown was a circle ornamented with points in the form of rays; and horns are also held to represent luminous rays,[12] which brings us back to some of the considerations we have already put forward in connection with symbolic weapons. It is quite clear, moreover, that horns can be likened to weapons, even in the most literal sense; that is indeed why they have always and everywhere been associated with the idea of strength or of power.[13] On the other hand, luminous rays are a most fitting attribute

8. This name thereby corresponds, in Hebrew, to the divine name *Shaddai*, which was to be the name of the God of Abraham more particularly; now, there are again, between Abraham and *Kronos*, some very remarkable relationships. [The author added '. . . that we will perhaps explain some day'. Without presuming to supplement René Guénon, we take the liberty of pointing out that in Islam, *Sayyidnā Ibrāhim* is precisely the Pole of the seventh Heaven, that of Saturn (= *Kronos*).]

9. In Brittany, St Corneille or Cornély, who took the place of *Apollon Karneios*, is looked on as the protector of horned animals. The considerations which we are now putting forward will enable the reader to understand that in reality there is something here that goes far beyond the mere 'play on words' that some people might be tempted to see.

10. The Greek word *Keraunos*, meaning thunderbolt, seems in fact to have been derived from the same root. Let us note in this connection that the thunderbolt usually strikes summits and elevated places or objects. The analogy of lightning with the solar ray must also be taken into account—a point to which we shall have to return.

11. In the Hebrew tradition, *Kether* or the 'Crown' is at the summit of the Sephirothic tree.

12. A particularly striking example is in the representations of Moses, for it is known that the horns he appears to carry on his brow are actually luminous rays. Others, among them Huet, Bishop of Avranches, have sought to identify Moses with Dionysus, who is likewise represented with horns. There are some other curious connections also, but they would lead us too far from our subject.

13. The same assimilation is of course valid for other animal weapons, such as tusks of the elephant or of the boar, the pointed form of which, moreover, is similar to that of horns. Let us add, however, that the duality of horns (and also of tusks) makes 'axial' symbolism inapplicable to them: in that respect they are to be assimilated rather to the two lateral points of the *trishula*; and this is also why we speak here of luminous rays in general and not of the 'Celestial Ray' which, both from the macrocosmic and microcosmic points of view, is an equivalent of the World Axis.

of power, either sacerdotal or royal as the case may be, that is, spiritual or temporal, for they show the power as an emanation or delegation from the very source of light which in fact power is when it is legitimate.

It would be easy to give many examples, from very diverse sources, of horns used as symbols of power. Some examples are to be found in the *Bible*, especially in the Apocalypse.[14] We will mention one other, taken from the Arab tradition which designates Alexander by the name *al-Iskandar dhu l-qarnayn*, that is, 'of the two horns',[15] which is most frequently interpreted in the sense of a double power extending over both the East and the West.[16] This interpretation is perfectly correct, though we must not exclude another fact which, if anything, completes it: Alexander, having been declared the son of Ammon by the oracle of that god, took as his emblem the horns of the ram which was Ammon's chief attribute;[17] and it was this divine origin, moreover, that legitimised him as successor of the ancient sovereigns of Egypt to whom the same origin was attributed. It is even said that he had himself represented thus on his coinage, which in the eyes of the Greeks identified him rather with Dionysus, whose memory he also evoked by his conquests, especially that of India; and Dionysus was the son of Zeus whom the Greeks likened to Ammon. It is possible that Alexander himself was privy to this idea; but Dionysus was, nevertheless, commonly represented with horns, not of the ram but of the bull, which from the point of view of symbolism is a rather important difference.[18]

It should be noted that there are in fact two main forms of horns in symbolism, those of the ram, which are 'solar', and those of the bull which, on the contrary, are 'lunar', and which recall moreover the form of the crescent itself.[19] In this connection, reference might also be made to the two zodiacal signs of the Ram and the Bull; but this would give rise above all to questions concerning the predominance of one form over the other in different traditions, which would lead to 'cyclic' considerations that we could not dream of entering into.

14. It must be noted that here the idea is not confined to legitimate power only, but is extended to all power whatsoever, malefic or benefic: there are the horns of the Lamb, but also the horns of the Beast.

15. The Arabic word *qarn* is the same as *horn*, the root KRN being changed easily to QRN and also to HRN, as in the English *horn*. The word *qarn* has another meaning as well, that of 'age' or 'cycle' and, most commonly, 'century'. This double meaning sometimes gives rise to a curious misunderstanding, namely that the epithet *dhu l-qarnayn* as applied to Alexander means that he lived two centuries.

16. In this sense, the two horns are an equivalent of the two heads of the heraldic eagle.

17. Ammon himself was called 'Master of the double horn' (*Book of the Dead*, 165).

18. It is also possible that Alexander wore a helmet with two horns; it is known that horned helmets were used among many ancient peoples. With the Assyro-Babylonians, the horned tiara was a characteristic emblem of the divinities.

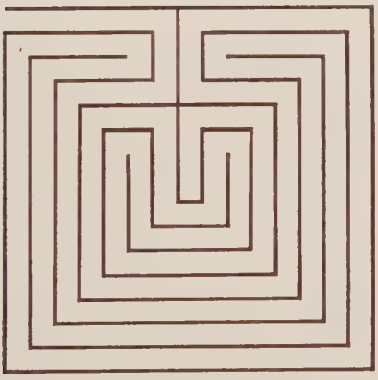
19. This distinction corresponds to the two forms which the alchemists give to the sign of mercury; the lunar form in this context refers to common mercury, and the solar form to the mercury of the sages.

To bring this outline to an end, we will draw attention to one more correspondence which in certain respects is to be found between the animal weapons that horns are and what might be called vegetable weapons, that is, thorns. In this connection, it must be noted that many of the plants that have an important symbolic significance are thorny.[20] Here also, thorns, like other pointed objects, evoke the idea of a summit or of an elevation; and in certain cases at least they can be taken to represent luminous rays.[21] We see, therefore, that the symbolism is always perfectly coherent as indeed it must be, by the very fact that far from being the result of some more or less artificial convention it is, on the contrary, based on the essential nature of things.

20. For example, the rose, the thistle, the acacia, the acanthus, etc.

21. In a way which some may find unexpected but which is nonetheless real and exact, the Christian symbolism of the crown of thorns (which are said to have been acacia thorns) comes thereby close to the crown of rays of which we spoke above. It is to be noted also that in several places, menhirs are called 'thorns', whence, in Brittany and elsewhere, place-names such as Belle-Epine (Beautiful Thorn), Notre Dame de l'Epine (Our Lady of the Thorn), etc; and the symbolism of the menhir, like that of the obelisk and the column, is related to the 'solar ray' as well as to the 'World Axis'.

The Symbolism of the Forms of the Cosmos



31 § The Cave and the Labyrinth

In a recent book,[1] W. F. Jackson Knight brings to light some interesting research of which the starting point is the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, where the gates to the cave of the Cumean Sibyl are described. Why are the Cretan labyrinth and its history described on these gates? The author very rightly refuses to see it as a more or less pointless digression, as have some who go no further than modern 'literary' conceptions. On the contrary, he considers that this passage must have a real symbolic value, since it is based on the close relationship between the labyrinth and the cave, both of which are connected with the same idea of a subterranean journey. According to the interpretation he gives of certain facts which, though pertaining to very different times and regions, are all in agreement, this idea had been originally linked to funerary rites and afterwards, in virtue of a certain analogy, had been transferred to initiatic rites. We will return to this point shortly, but we must first express some reservations as to his understanding of what initiation actually is. In fact, he seems to look on it merely as a product of 'human thought' endowed with a sort of vitality which assures it a kind of permanence through the ages, even if it sometimes exists only in a latent state. After all we have said on this subject, there is no need for us to point out yet again how inadequate such a conception is, above all in that it fails to take into account the 'supra-human' elements which are, precisely, what constitute the essential. We will insist only on this: the idea of subsistence in a latent state brings up the hypothesis of conservation in a 'collective unconscious' borrowed from certain recent psychological theories. Whatever one may think of these, the application that is made of them here shows a complete failure to recognise the necessity of the initiatic 'chain', that is, of a genuine unbroken transmission. It is true that there is another issue that must not be confused with this: it has happened sometimes that things of a strictly initiatic order have found expression through individualities who were in no way conscious of their true significance, as we have explained previously in connection with the Grail legend.[2] But on the one hand this in no way affects the reality of the initiation

1. W. F. Jackson Knight, *Cumean Gates, a Reference of the Sixth Aeneid to Initiation Patterns*, Oxford, 1936.

2. [See 5 and 6 above.]

itself; and on the other, Virgil cannot possibly be thought of in this way: he, just like Dante, gives us indications that are much too precise and too obviously conscious to leave us in any doubt that he must have had some initiatic affiliation. What is in question has nothing to do with 'poetic inspiration' in the modernist sense; and in this respect, Jackson Knight is too prone to share the 'literary' views which, on other counts, his thesis goes against. None the less, it must be acknowledged how meritorious it is for a university writer to have the courage to broach such a subject, or even to mention initiation.

To return now to the relationships between the funerary cave and the initiatic cave, even though these relationships certainly exist, the identification of the one with the other as to their symbolism represents only half the truth at most. Let it be noted moreover, that even from the funerary perspective alone, the idea of deriving the symbolism from the ritual, instead of seeing on the contrary, in the ritual itself, symbolism in action, which it truly is, already involves the author in great difficulties when he is faced by the fact that the subterranean journey is almost always followed by a journey in the open air, which many traditions represent as a navigation. This would indeed be inconceivable if it were only a question of a vivid description of a ritual inhumation; but it becomes perfectly comprehensible when we know that it is in reality a question of the various phases passed through by the being in the course of a navigation that is truly 'beyond the grave', and which in no way concerns the body which it has left behind in quitting terrestrial life. On the other hand, and by reason of the analogy existing between death in the ordinary sense of the word and the initiatic death of which we have spoken elsewhere, the same symbolic description can be applied equally well to what happens to the being in either case; there, as far as the cave and the subterranean journey are concerned, lies the reason for the assimilation in question, insofar as it is justified. But at the point beyond which it cannot go, we are still only at what leads up to initiation, and not at initiation itself.

In fact, strictly speaking, there is only a preparation for initiation in death to the profane world, followed by the 'descent into Hell' which is, of course, the same thing as the journey in the subterranean world to which the cave gives access; as for initiation itself, far from being considered as a death, it is on the contrary like a 'second birth', as well as like a passage from darkness to light. Now the place of this birth is still the cave, at least when it is there that the initiation is accomplished, in fact or symbolically; for it goes without saying that one must not generalise too widely, and that, as in the case of the labyrinth which we shall speak of later, it is not a question of something that is necessarily common to all initiatic forms without exception. The same thing is to be seen, moreover, even exoterically, in the Christian symbolism of the Nativity, quite as clearly as in other traditions; and it is obvious that the cave as birthplace cannot have the same meaning as the cave as the place of death or burial. It may be noted however, so as at least to reconcile with each other these different and even apparently opposed aspects, that death and birth are after all two aspects of one same change of state; and

the passage from one state to another is always considered as having to be effected in darkness.[3] In that sense, the cave would be, more precisely, the very place of the passage; but this, though strictly true, is only one side of its complex symbolism.

The fact that the author has not succeeded in seeing the other side of this symbolism is due very probably to the influence of the theories of certain 'historians of religion'. Following them, he in fact admits that the cave must always be connected with 'chthonian' cults, doubtless for the somewhat 'simplistic' reason that it is situated inside the earth; but this interpretation is very far from the truth.[4] Nevertheless, he cannot help but realise that the initiatic cave is represented above all as an image of the world;[5] but his hypothesis prevents him from drawing the obvious conclusion, namely that the cave must form a complete whole and contain in itself the representation of heaven as well as of the earth. If heaven is expressly mentioned in some text or represented in some monument as corresponding to the roof of the cave, his explanations become so confused and unsatisfactory that it is impossible to follow them. The truth is that, far from being a place of darkness, the initiatic cave is illuminated from within, and it is outside the cave that darkness reigns, the profane world naturally being likened to the 'outer darkness' and the 'second birth' being at the same time an 'illumination'.[6] If it be asked why the cave is considered in this way from the initiatic point of view, the answer is that on the one hand the cave, as symbol, is complementary to the mountain, while on the other hand the symbolism of the cave is closely related to that of the heart. We propose to treat these two essential points separately; but it is not difficult to understand, after all we have already said elsewhere, that what we are concerned with here is directly related to the representation of spiritual centres.

We will pass over the other questions which, however important they may be in themselves, are marginal to our present theme, such as, for example, the meaning of the 'golden bough'. It is very doubtful whether this bough can be identified with the baton or rod which, in different forms, is to be found quite

3. In this connection, we may also recall the grain of wheat in the Eleusinian mysteries.

4. This unilateral interpretation leads him to a curious misapprehension: among other examples, he cites the Shinto myth of the dance performed before the entrance to a cave in order to compel the 'ancestral goddess' hidden within to come out. Unhappily for his thesis, it is not a question of the 'earth mother' as he believes and even expressly states, but of the solar goddess, which is altogether different.

5. In Masonry, it is the same with the lodge, a designation that some have even compared to the Sanskrit *loka*, which is in fact accurate, symbolically, if not etymologically. But it must be added that the lodge is not to be equated with the cave, and that the equivalent of the cave is only to be found, in this context, at the very beginning of the initiatic trials, so that no significance would be attached to it other than that of a subterranean place directly related to the ideas of death and 'descent'.

6. In Masonic symbolism, and for the same reasons, it is obligatory that the 'lights' should be inside the lodge; and the word *loka* that we mentioned just now comes also directly from a root of which the primary meaning is that of light.

widely in traditional symbolism.[7] Without insisting any more on this point, we will now turn to the labyrinth, the meaning of which may appear still more enigmatic, or at least more disguised, than that of the cave; and we will also examine the relationship between the one and the other.

The labyrinth, as Jackson Knight has clearly perceived, has a double function, in the sense that it permits or forbids, as the case may be, access to a certain place into which not everyone must be allowed to penetrate indiscriminately. Only those who are qualified will be able to pass through it to the end, while the others will be prevented from entering or will go astray along the path. It is immediately obvious that a 'selection' is involved here, which is closely related to initiation. The course of the labyrinth is therefore, in this respect, a representation of the initiatic trials; and it is easy to conceive that when the labyrinth actually served as a means of access to certain sanctuaries, it could be planned so as to enable the corresponding rites to be accomplished in the very course of passage. Also involved is the idea of 'travel', in the sense in which it is comparable to the trials themselves, as is still the case in Masonry, for example, where each of the symbolic trials is designated as a 'journey'. Another equivalent symbolism is that of 'pilgrimage', which brings to mind, in this connection, the labyrinths marked out in the past on the pavement of certain churches; to go along one of these was considered as a 'substitute' for pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Moreover, if the point at which the path ends represents a place reserved for the 'elect', that place is indeed a 'Holy Land' in the initiatic sense of this expression. In other words, it is nothing other than the image of a spiritual centre, as is every place of initiation.[8]

It goes without saying, on the other hand, that the labyrinth as a means of defense or protection has various uses outside the initiatic domain. The author points out, for example, its 'tactical' use at the entrance to certain ancient cities and other fortified places. But it is an error to believe that in such cases the purely profane usage came first and subsequently suggested the idea of ritual use. This is actually a reversal of the normal relationships, a reversal which moreover conforms to modern conceptions, but to these only, and which it is quite illegitimate to attribute to ancient civilisations. In fact, in every strictly traditional civilisation, all things necessarily start from the principle or from what is closest to it, to descend from there to more and more contingent applications; and even these are never considered from the profane point of view which is, as we have often explained, only the result of a degeneration whereby the awareness of their attachment to the

7. It would certainly be much more accurate to compare this 'golden bough' to the Druid mistletoe and the Masonic acacia, without speaking of the 'branches' of the Christian feast which bears precisely this name [i.e., Palm Sunday] as a symbol and gage of resurrection and immortality.

8. Jackson Knight mentions these labyrinths, but attributes to them merely an elementary religious meaning. He seems to be unaware that their lay-out in no way depended on the exoteric doctrine, but pertained exclusively to the symbolism of the initiatic organisations of builders.

principle has been lost. In the case in question, it can easily be seen that something other is involved than what modern 'tacticians' would see: we have simply to remember that this 'labyrinthine' mode of defense was used not only against human enemies, but also against hostile psychic influences, which clearly indicates that it must have had in itself a ritual value.[9] But there is more to it than this: the founding of cities, the choice of their location, and the plan according to which they were built, were subject to rules which derived essentially from 'sacred science' and which in consequence were far from answering only to 'utilitarian' ends, at least in the exclusively material sense currently given to this word. No matter how completely strange these things may be to the mentality of our contemporaries, it is very necessary to take them into account, failing which those who study the vestiges of ancient civilisations will never be able to understand the true meaning and purpose of what they record, even for what has now come to be called the domain of 'ordinary life' but which had then, like everything else, a strictly ritual and traditional status.

The origin of the name *labyrinth* is rather obscure and has been the subject of much discussion. Indeed, contrary to what some have thought, it seems that it is not directly connected with the name *labrys* (the double edged Cretan axe), but rather that both names derive from the same ancient word designating 'stone' (root *la*, whence *laos* in Greek and *lapis* in Latin), so that etymologically the labyrinth could, in brief, be nothing other than an edifice of the type of construction called 'Cyclopean'. This, however, is only the outermost meaning of the name which, in a deeper sense, is bound up with the entire body of stone symbolism which we have mentioned before, in relation either to 'baetyls' or to 'thunderbolts' (identified precisely with the stone axe or *labrys*) and which has also many other aspects. Jackson Knight has at least some perception of this, for he alludes to 'men born from stone' (let it be noted in passing that this explains the Greek word *laos*), of which the legend of Deucalion gives us the best known example. A more precise study of the period this relates to, if such a thing were feasible, would undoubtedly enable us to give a meaning to the so-called 'stone-age' quite different from that which is attributed to it by the prehistorians. This brings us back to the cave which, insofar as it is hollowed out of rock, naturally or artificially, belongs to the same symbolism;[10] but there is no reason to suppose that the labyrinth itself necessarily had likewise to be hollowed out of rock. Though it may have been so in certain

9. We will not insist on the 'labyrinthine' march of certain processions and 'ritual dances', in order not to be led too far from our subject; they are above all typical of rites of protection—or 'apotropaic' rites, as the author says—thereby belonging directly to the same deterrent category: it is a question essentially of stopping and turning aside malefic influences by a technique based on the knowledge of certain laws according to which these influences exert their action.

10. Prehistoric caves were probably not habitations, as is commonly believed, but sanctuaries of the 'men of stone', understood in the sense we have just indicated. It is therefore within the traditional forms of the period in question and in respect of a certain 'occultation' of knowledge that the cave would have come to be recognised as a symbol of spiritual centres and subsequently as a place of initiation.

cases, that is only an accidental element, so to speak, and cannot enter into its actual definition; for whatever the relationships of the cave and the labyrinth, it is nevertheless important not to confuse them especially when, as here, we are concerned more particularly with the initiatic cave.

It is in fact quite obvious that if the cave is the place where initiation itself is accomplished, the labyrinth, site of the preceding trials, can be nothing more than the way that leads to it, as well as the obstacle that bars the unqualified profane from approaching it. Let us also remember that at Cumae the labyrinth was depicted on the gates as if this representation was somehow a substitute for the labyrinth itself;[11] and Aeneas, while he stops at the entrance to ponder these designs, could in fact be said to pass through the labyrinth mentally if not bodily. On the other hand it does not seem that this mode of access had always been exclusively reserved for sanctuaries situated in caves or symbolically equated with them for, as we have already explained, this is not a characteristic common to all traditional forms; and the purpose of the labyrinth, as defined above, makes it equally suitable for the approaches to any place of initiation, to any sanctuary intended for the 'mysteries' and not for public rites. With this reservation there is none the less one reason to believe that originally at least the labyrinth must have been specifically connected with the initiatic cave: at the outset, both the one and the other seem to have belonged to the same traditional forms, those pertaining to the age of the 'men of stone' to which we have just alluded. The cave and the labyrinth would have begun, therefore, by being closely united, even though they may not have invariably remained so in all later forms.

If we consider the labyrinth in connection with the cave, coiled around it and ending finally with it, then in the complex thus formed the cave is at the innermost central point, which corresponds perfectly with the idea of the spiritual centre, and which agrees equally well with the equivalent symbolism of the heart, to which we propose to return. It should be noted also that when the same cave is the place of both initiatic death and of 'second birth', it must be considered as giving access not only to subterranean or 'infernal' regions, but also to supra-terrestrial domains. This, again, corresponds to the notion of the central point, which is, both macrocosmically as well as microcosmically, the point of communication with all the higher and lower states. Only thus can the cave be, as we have said, the complete image of the world, reflecting all states without exception; otherwise, the equation of the cave roof with the Heavens would be absolutely incomprehensible. But on the other hand, if it is in the cave itself, in the interval between the initiatic death and the 'second birth', that the 'descent into Hell' is accomplished, we must be well on our guard against considering that descent as represented by the passage through the labyrinth, and then it still remains to be seen what this passage corresponds to in reality. It represents the 'outer darkness', to which we have already referred, and to which the state of 'errancy' (if we may use this word) perfectly

11. Another such example of deterrent is that of the 'labyrinthine' figures traced on walls in ancient Greece in order to prevent malefic influences from gaining access to the house.

applies, and of which such a passage is the exact expression. This theme of 'outer darkness' could be developed in greater detail, but that would lead us beyond the limits of the present study. Besides, we think we have said enough to show, on the one hand, the interest of research such as that undertaken by Jackson Knight and put forward in his book, but also on the other hand, if we are to see the results in perspective and grasp their true importance, the necessity of a strictly 'technical' knowledge of what is involved. Without such knowledge we can never achieve anything other than incomplete and hypothetical reconstructions which, even where they are not falsified by some preconceived idea, will remain as 'dead' as the relics on which they are based.

32 § The Heart and the Cave

We have already mentioned the close relationship between the symbolism of the cave and that of the heart, which explains the initiatic function of the cave as spiritual centre. In fact, the heart is essentially a symbol of the centre, whether it be the centre of a being or, analogously, of a world, that is, whether the standpoint be microcosmic or macrocosmic. It is therefore natural, given such a relationship, that the same meaning should be likewise attached to the cave; but that symbolic connection itself calls at this point for a fuller explanation.

The 'cave of the heart' is a well known traditional expression. The Sanskrit word *guha* generally designates a cave, but it is used also of the internal cavity of the heart, and consequently of the heart itself. This 'cave of the heart' is the vital centre in which resides not only *jīvātmā* but also unconditioned *Ātmā*, which in reality is identical with Brahma itself, as we have explained elsewhere.[1] The word *guha* is derived from the root *guh*, meaning 'to cover' or 'conceal' or 'hide', as does another similar root, *gup*, whence *gupta* which applies to everything of a secret character, everything that is not externally manifested. This is the equivalent of the Greek *kruptos* that gives the word 'crypt', which is synonymous with cave. These ideas are related to the centre insofar as it is considered as the most inward and consequently the most hidden point. At the same time, they refer also to the initiatic secret, either in itself or insofar as it is symbolised by the disposition of the place where the initiation is accomplished, a hidden or 'covered' place,[2] inaccessible to the profane, whether the access to it be barred by a 'labyrinthine' structure

1. *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta*, ch. 3 (see *Chāndogya Upanishad*, III: 14. 3 and VIII: 1, 1.)

2. Cf., the Masonic expression, *être à couvert*, to be under cover, to be safe.

or in any other way (as for example, the 'temples without doors' of Far Eastern initiation), and always regarded as an image of the centre.

On the other hand, it is to be noted that this hiddenness or secrecy which characterises spiritual centres or their figurative representation implies that the traditional truth itself is no longer accessible in all its fullness to all men equally, which is the sign of a period of 'obscuration', at least in a relative sense. This makes it possible to 'place' such a symbolism in the course of the march of the cyclic process; but that is a point to which we shall have to come back to more fully in studying the relationships between the mountain and the cave, insofar as both are taken as symbols of the centre. For the moment we will simply point out in this respect that the diagram of the heart is a down-pointing triangle (the 'triangle of the heart' is yet another traditional expression); and this same figure also stands for the cave, whereas the mountain, or the pyramid which is its equivalent, is figured on the contrary by an up-pointing triangle; this shows that we have here a relationship that is inverse, and also in a certain sense complementary. Let us add, on the subject of this representation of the heart and the cave by an inverted triangle, that here is one of those cases in which clearly no idea of 'black magic' is involved, despite the all too frequent assertions of those whose knowledge of symbolism is totally insufficient.

Let us now return to what is hidden, according to the Hindu tradition, in the 'cave of the heart': it is the principle of the being, which, in this state of envelopment and with regard to manifestation, is compared to what is smallest (the word *dahara*, which denotes the cavity where it resides, also refers to this same notion of smallness), while in reality it is what is greatest, just as the point is spatially infinitesimal and even null, although it is the principle by which all space is produced, or again, just as the number one appears as the smallest of numbers, although it contains them all principially, and produces from itself all their unending series. So here again we find the expression of an inverse relationship, inasmuch as the principle is considered according to two different points of view; of these, the point of view of extreme smallness concerns the principle's hidden and as it were 'invisible' state which, for the being in question, is as yet only a 'virtuality', but which will be the starting point of its spiritual development; there indeed lies the beginning (*initium*) of this development, which is directly related to initiation in the etymological sense of this term; and it is precisely from this point of view that the cave can be considered as the place of the 'second birth'. In this respect, we find texts such as the following: 'Know that this *Agni*, who is the foundation of the eternal (principial) world, and through whom that world can be attained, is hidden in the cave (of the heart)',[3] which in the microcosmic order refers to the 'second birth'; and also, by transposition into the macrocosmic order, it refers to its analogue, which is the birth of the *Avatāra*.

It has already been mentioned that what resides in the heart is both *jīvātmā*,

3. *Katha Upanishad* I: 14.

from the standpoint of individual manifestation, and unconditioned *Ātmā* or *Paramātmā* from the principial point of view; the distinction between individual and principle is no more than an illusory one; it only exists with regard to manifestation, but they are one in absolute reality. These are the 'two who have entered into the cave' and who at the same time are also said to 'dwell on the highest summit', so that the two symbolisms of the cave and the mountain are here reunited.[4] The text adds that 'those who know Brahma call them darkness and light'; this refers especially to the symbolism of *Nara-nārāyana* of which we have spoken in connection with the *Ātmā-Gītā*,[5] quoting this very same text: *Nara*, the human or mortal who is *Jīvātmā*, is identified with *Arjuna*; and *Nārāyana*, the divine or the immortal, which is *Paramātmā*, is identified with *Krishna*. Now, according to their literal meanings, the name *Krishna* denotes darkness of hue and that of *Arjuna* lightness, or, respectively, night and day, inasmuch as they are considered as representing the unmanifested and the manifested.[6] An exactly similar symbolism in this respect is that of the Dioscuri in their relationship with the two hemispheres, one dark and the other light, as we have indicated in connection with the meaning of the 'double spiral'.[7] On the other hand, these 'two' that is, *Jīvātmā* and *Paramātmā*, are also the 'two birds' which appear in other texts as 'abiding on the same tree'' (just as *Arjuna* and *Krishna* are mounted in the same chariot), and who are said to be 'inseparably united' because, as we said above, they are really one, the distinction between them being no more than illusory.[8] It must be noted here that the symbolism of the tree is essentially 'axial', like that of the mountain; and the cave, inasmuch as it is considered as situated under the mountain or within it, is also on the axis, where in any case, whatever the point of view, the centre must always be, for it is in the centre that the individual is united with the Universal.

Before leaving this subject, there is a point of language to be considered, the importance of which should not be overestimated, but which is curious nevertheless. The Egyptian word *hor*, which is the name of *Horus*, seems to mean *heart*. *Horus* would thus be the 'Heart of the World', according to a designation that is to be found in most traditions and which is in perfect keeping with his symbolism as a whole, insofar as that can be determined. It might be tempting, at first sight, to connect this word *hor* with *cor*, the Latin name for heart, the more so in that in the different languages the similar roots which denote the heart are to be found with either the aspirate or the guttural as initial letter: thus, on the one hand, *hrid* or *hridaya* in Sanskrit, *heart* in English, *herz* in German, and on the other, *ker* or *kardion* in Greek, and *cor* itself

4. *Katha Upanishad* III, 1; cf *Brahma Sūtras* I: 2, 11–12.

5. [*Le Voile d'Isis*, March 1930.]

6. Cf., A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'The Darker Side of the Dawn' [Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections, 94, 1] and 'Angel and Titan, an Essay in Vedic Ontology' [*Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 55, 373–419].

7. *The Great Triad*, Ch. 5.

8. *Mundaka Upanishad* III: 1, 1; *Svētāsvatara Upanishad* IV, 6.

(genitive *cordis*) in Latin. But the common root of all these words, including the last mentioned, is in reality HRD or KRD, which can scarcely be the case with the word *hor*, so that here it would be not a question of the same root but only of a sort of phonetic convergence, which is none the less striking. There is however something that is perhaps more remarkable and in any case directly related to our subject: in Hebrew, the word *hor* or *hūr*, written with the letter *heth*, signifies cave; this does not necessarily mean that there is an etymological link between these Hebrew and Egyptian words, although strictly speaking they may have a more or less remote common origin, but however that may be, their resemblance is none the less of considerable interest, seeing that there can be no such thing as pure chance. Nor is this all: in Hebrew, *hor* or *har*, written this time with the letter *hē*, signifies mountain; now since *heth* is, among aspirates, a reinforcement or hardening of *hē*, as it were a compression, and since *heth* moreover expresses in itself, ideographically, a notion of limit or enclosure, we see that the very relationship between the two words denotes the cave as being the place enclosed within the mountain, as indeed it is, literally as well as symbolically; and this brings us back yet again to the relationships between the mountain and the cave, which we must examine now in more detail.

33 § The Mountain and the Cave

WE have seen that there is a close relationship between the mountain and the cave in that both of them are taken as symbols of spiritual centres as are also, for obvious reasons, all axial or polar symbols, amongst which the mountain is in fact one of the most important. In this respect we will mention that the cave must be considered as situated beneath the mountain or inside it, so as to be likewise on the axis, which further reinforces the link between the two symbols, each of which is in a sense the complement of the other. It must be noted however, so that we can 'place' them exactly in relationship to one another, that the mountain is more primordial in its significance than the cave: it is so in virtue of being outwardly visible, we might even say of being the most visible object from all sides, whereas on the contrary the cave is, as we have said, a place that is essentially hidden and closed off. It can easily be deduced from this that the representation of the spiritual centre by the mountain corresponds to the original period of terrestrial humanity, during which the truth was wholly accessible to all (whence the name *Satya-Yuga*, the summit of the mountain being *Satya-Loka*, or 'place of truth'). But when, owing to the downward course of the cycle, this same truth was only within the scope of a more or less restricted élite (which coincides with the beginning of initiation in its strictest sense) and became hidden from the

majority of men, then the cave was a more fitting symbol for the spiritual centre and subsequently for the initiatic sanctuaries which are its images. By such a change, the centre did not forsake the mountain, so to speak, but only withdrew from its summit to its interior. On the other hand, this same change is in a way a reversal by which, as we have explained elsewhere, the 'celestial world', indicated by the elevation of the mountain above the surface of the earth, has become in a sense the 'subterranean world' (though in reality it is not the celestial world that has changed but the conditions of the outer world, and consequently the relationship between the two worlds) and this reversal is represented by the respective diagrammatic figures of the mountain and of the cave, which at the same time express their complementarity.

As has already been mentioned, the figure of the mountain, as well as that of the pyramid and the mound which are its equivalents, is a triangle with the summit pointed upwards. That of the cave, on the contrary, is a triangle the summit of which points downwards and which is therefore the inverse of the other. This inverted triangle is also the figure of the heart[1] and of the cup, to which the heart is generally assimilated in symbolism, as we have shown in connection the Holy Grail.[2] Let us add that these last symbols and their like refer, from a more general point of view, to the passive or feminine principle of universal manifestation or to one of its aspects,[3] while those represented by the upright triangle relate to the active or masculine principle, which all goes to bear out the complementarity in question. On the other hand, if the two triangles are placed one beneath the other, which corresponds to the position of the cave under the mountain, it will be noticed that the lower triangle can be considered as the reflection of the upper triangle; (*Figure* 13)

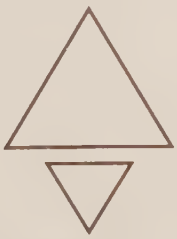


Figure 13

and this idea of reflection is most aptly expressive of a derived symbol's relationship with a primordial symbol, in accordance with the already mentioned relationship between the mountain and the cave as successive representations of the spiritual centre at different phases of cyclic development.

1. This figuration can be related to the fact that the Arabic for heart (*qalb*) literally signifies that it is in an 'inverted' position (*maqlūb*) [cf., Titus Burckhardt, 'Concerning the *Barzakh*', in *Mirror of the Intellect*, pp. 193–99, Cambridge U.K., 1987].

2. In ancient Egypt, the vase was the hieroglyph of the heart. The 'cup' of the Tarot also corresponds to the 'heart' of ordinary playing cards.

3. In India, the inverted triangle is one of the chief symbols of the *Shakti*; it is also that of the primordial Waters.

It may seem surprising that the inverted triangle should be represented in the figure as being smaller than the upright one whose reflection it is and whose equal in size it must therefore presumably be. But such a difference of proportion is not exceptional in symbolism: thus, in the Hebrew Kabbala, the 'Macroprosope' or 'Great Countenance' has as its reflection the 'Microprosope' or 'Little Countenance'. Moreover, in the present case there is a more special reason: as regards the relationship between the cave and the heart, we have recalled the text of the *Upanishads* where it is said that the Principle which resides at the 'centre of the being', is 'smaller than a grain of rice, smaller than a grain of barley, smaller than a grain of mustard, smaller than a grain of millet, smaller than the seed that is in a grain of millet', but also at the same time 'larger than the earth, larger than the atmosphere (or the intermediate world), larger than the heavens, larger than all the worlds together'.[4] Now in the inverse relationship of the two symbols we are considering, it is the mountain which here corresponds to the idea of 'largeness', and the cave (or the cavity in the heart) which corresponds to smallness. The aspect of 'largeness' refers to absolute reality, and that of 'smallness' to appearances relative to manifestation. It is perfectly normal, therefore, that the first should be represented in this context by the symbol that corresponds to a primordial condition,[5] and the second by that which corresponds to a later condition of 'obscuration' and spiritual 'envelopment'.

In order to represent the cave as being situated in the very interior (or in the heart, we might say) of the mountain, we need only place the inverted triangle inside the upright triangle so that their centres coincide (*Figure* 14);

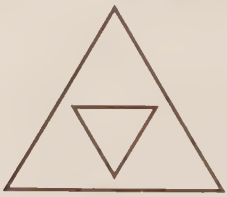


Figure 14

the inverted triangle will then have to be smaller than the other so as to fit into it, but apart from this difference the whole of the figure thus obtained is clearly identical with the 'Seal of Solomon', where the two opposed triangles likewise represent two complementary principles, with all their different applications. On the other hand, if the sides of the inverted triangle are made equal to half those of the upright triangle (we have made them a little less in order that the two triangles might appear entirely separate from one another, but it is obvious that the entrance to the cave must be on the surface of the mountain and therefore that the triangle which represents the cave

4. *Chāndogya Upanishad* III, 14, 3.

5. It is known that Dante located the Earthly Paradise at the summit of a mountain, which confirms this situation as that of the spiritual centre in the 'primordial state' of humanity.

ought actually to touch the outline of the mountain)[6] the smaller triangle will divide the surface of the larger one into four equal parts, of which one will be the inverted triangle itself while the three others will be upright triangles. This last consideration, as well as certain numerical considerations connected with it, has no really direct bearing on our present subject, but we will doubtless have occasion to come back to it later in the course of other studies.

34 § The Heart and the World Egg

AFTER all the observations made so far on the various aspects of the symbolism of the cave, we have still one more important point to speak of, namely the relationship of this symbol with the World Egg. But in order to make this entirely clear and to connect it more directly with what has already been said, we must first speak of the symbolic relationships of the heart with the World Egg. This could seem surprising at a first glance which might discern nothing other than a certain similarity of shape between the heart and the egg; but such a resemblance in itself can have no real significance without some deeper underlying relationships. That a connection does exist is shown by the fact that the *omphalos* and the *baetyl*, which incontestably are symbols of the centre, are often of ovoid form, as was, for example, the *Omphalos* of Delphi;[1] and it is this form which we must now explain.

What is to be noted before all else in this respect is that the World Egg is the figure, not of the cosmos in its state of full manifestation, but of that from which its development will be accomplished; and if this development is represented as an expansion in all directions from its starting point, that point must clearly coincide with the centre itself, so that the World Egg is indeed central in relation to the cosmos.[2] The Biblical figure of the Earthly Paradise, which is also the 'Centre of the World', is that of a circular precinct which may be considered as the horizontal section of an ovoid form as well as that of a spherical form. Let us add that, in fact, the difference between the two forms consists essentially in this, that the spherical form, extending equally in all directions

6. It will be noted, according to the same diagram, that if the mountain is replaced by the pyramid, the pyramid's inner chamber is the exact equivalent of the cave.

1. We have examined these symbols especially in *The Lord of the World*. We also noted there that in other cases they take a conical form which relates directly to the symbol of the mountain, so that here again we find the two complementary representations that have already been mentioned in this context.

2. The symbol of the fruit also has the same meaning, in this connection, as that of the egg. We will no doubt return to this point in the continuation of these studies [see *Aperçus sur l'initiation*, 93]; and we will note even now that this symbol has, in addition, an obvious link with that of the garden, and therefore with the Earthly Paradise.

from its centre, is the true primordial form, while that of the egg corresponds to a state which is already differentiated, and which is derived from the preceding one by a sort of polarization or splitting of the centre.[3] The polarization may be said moreover to take place once the sphere completes a rotation around a determined axis, since from that moment all the directions of space no longer uniformly play the same part; and this marks precisely the transition from the one to the other of these two successive phases of the cosmogonic process, which are symbolised respectively by the sphere and the egg.[4]

It only remains now to show that what is contained in the World Egg is, as we said above, really identical to what is also contained symbolically in the heart, and in the cave as well insofar as it is the equivalent of the heart. The content in question is the spiritual 'seed' which, in the macrocosmic order, is called *Hiranyagarbha* in the Hindu tradition, literally, the 'golden embryo'.[5] This seed is truly the primordial *Avatāra*,[6] and we have seen that the birthplace of the *Avatāra*, as well as of that which corresponds to it from the microcosmic point of view, is represented precisely by the heart or the cave. It might be objected that in the text we then cited[7] as well as in many other cases, the *Avatāra* is expressly designated as *Agni*, while it is said that it is *Brahmā*[8] who is enveloped in the World Egg (called, for that very reason *Brahmānda*) to be born there as *Hiranyagarbha*. But apart from the fact that the different names really designate only different divine attributes which, far from being separate entities, are necessarily always connected with one another, it should be noted more especially here that since gold is considered as the 'mineral light' and the 'sun of metals', *Hiranyagarbha* is defined by its very name as a fiery principle, and for this reason, together with that of its central position, it is assimilated symbolically to the Sun which, moreover, is in all traditions one of the figures of the 'Heart of the World'.

To pass on now to the microcosmic application, we need only recall the analogy that exists between the *pinda*, the subtle embryo of the individual

3. Thus in plane geometry the single centre of the circle, in dividing, gives birth to two focuses of an ellipse. This same division is also repeated very clearly in the Far Eastern symbol of the *Yin-yang*, which is itself not unrelated to the World Egg.

4. Let us point out also, as regards the spherical form, that in the Islamic tradition, the sphere of pure primordial light is the *Rūḥ muḥammadiyyah*, which is also the 'Heart of the World'; and the entire cosmos is vivified by the 'pulsations' of this sphere which is the *barzakh par excellence* (see again on this subject Titus Burckhardt, in *Mirror of the Intellect*, pp. 193–99).

5. See *Man and His Becoming According to the Vēdānta*, ch. 13.

6. The designation of Christ as seed in various Scriptural texts relates to this, and perhaps we will speak again of this on another occasion [see *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, ch. 48 and, in the present volume, 74 below, 'The Mustard Seed'].

7. *Katha Upanishad* I: 14.

8. [Note the distinction between the words *Brahma* and *Brahmā*. *Brahma* (neuter, nominative singular) signifies the Supreme Principle (cf., Eckhart's concept of Godhead) which does not enter into relation with manifestation. *Brahmā* (masculine, nominative singular) is one of the *Trimurti* (*Brahmā, Vishnu, Shiva*) or Triple Manifestation of *Īshwara*. It is *Īshwara* who, as Divine Personality, is most readily comparable to Western conceptions of the Deity. Tr.]

being, and the *Brahmānda* or 'World Egg';[9] and the *pinda*, inasmuch as it is the permanent and indestructible seed of the being, is identified also with the 'kernel of immortality' which is called *luz* in the Hebraic tradition.[10] It is true that, in general, the *luz* is not spoken of as situated in the heart, or that at least the heart is just one of the different localizations which it may be given in its correspondence with the bodily organism, and that it is not this localisation that is most commonly in question; but it none the less comes into its own as one of them precisely when, in view of all that has already been said, it must do so, that is, when the *luz* is in immediate relation with the 'second birth'. In fact, these localisations, which relate also to the Hindu doctrine of the *chakras*, refer to many conditions of the human being, or to phases of his spiritual development: at the base of the vertebral column is the state of 'sleep' where the *luz* is to be found in the ordinary man;[11] when the *luz* is in the heart, it is in the initial phase of its 'germination', which is the 'second birth'; when it is at the 'frontal eye', then the perfection of the human state has been attained, the reintegration into the 'primordial state'. Finally, when it is at the crown of the head, that signifies the passage to supra-individual states; and we shall find yet again the exact correspondence of these different stages when we return to the symbolism of the initiatic cave.[12]

35 § The Cave and the World Egg

WE have already said that the initiatic cave is considered as an image of the world; but on the other hand by reason of its symbolic assimilation with the

9. *Yathā pinda tathā Brahmānda* (see *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 13 and 19).

10. For further developments on this point see again *The Lord of the World*. It may be noted also that the assimilation of the 'second birth' to a 'germination' of the *luz* clearly recalls the Taoist description of the initiatic process as 'endogeny of the immortal'.

11. The serpent entwined around the World Egg, and represented sometimes around the *Omphalos* and the *baetyl* is, in this respect, *Kundalinī* entwined around the 'kernel of immortality' which is also related to the symbolism of the 'black stone'. It is to this 'inferior' position of the *luz* that direct allusion is made in the Hermetic formula: *Visita inferiora terræ, rectificando invenies occultum lapidem*; the 'rectification' here is the 're-erecting' which marks,after the descent, the beginning of ascensional movement that corresponds to the awakening of the *Kundalinī*; and the continuation of this same formula designates the 'hidden stone' as *veram medicinam*, which identifies it also with *amrita*, nourishment or beverage of immortality.

12. Let us note again that the designation of the 'golden embryo' suggests a certain parallel with alchemical symbolism which, furthermore, confirms comparisons such as those we indicated in the previous note; and we shall see also, in this respect, that the initiatic cave corresponds in a remarkable way to the Hermetic *athanor*. There is no occasion to be surprised at these similarities, for the process of the 'Great Work', understood in its true sense, is fundamentally nothing other than the very process of initiation.

heart, it represents more particularly the heart's most central part. There might seem to be here two different points of view, but in reality they in no way contradict one another, and what we have explained about the World Egg is enough to reconcile them and even to identify them in a certain sense. In fact, the World Egg is central in relation to the cosmos and, at the same time, it contains in seed all that the cosmos will contain in its fully manifested state. All things are to be found in the World Egg, therefore, but in a state of 'envelopment' which also is represented, precisely, by the situation of the cave, as we have explained, that is, by its hiddenness and its inaccessibility. The two halves into which the World Egg is divided, according to one of the most common aspects of its symbolism, become respectively heaven and earth. Likewise, in the cave, the ground corresponds to the earth and the vault to heaven; so there is nothing in all this that is not perfectly coherent and normal.

There is still another question to be considered, one that is particularly important from an initiatic point of view: we have spoken of the cave as the place of the 'second birth'; but between this 'second birth' and the 'third birth' there is an essential distinction to be made that corresponds to the distinction between initiation into the Lesser Mysteries and initiation into the Greater Mysteries. If the third birth is also represented as taking place in a cave, how does the symbolism of the cave adapt itself to this? The second birth, which can be rightly called 'psychic regeneration', takes place in the domain of the subtle possibilities of the human individuality. The third birth, on the contrary, being realised directly in the spiritual order and no longer in the psychic order, gives access to the domain of supra-individual possibilities. The one is thus strictly a 'birth in the cosmos' (to which the birth of the *Avatāra* corresponds in the macrocosmic order), and consequently it is logical that it be represented as taking place entirely within the cave; but the other is a 'birth out of the cosmos', and to this 'exit from the cosmos' (according to the expression of Hermes),[1] there must correspond (in order that the symbolism be complete) a final exit from the cave; for the cave contains only the possibilities included within the cosmos, those possibilities precisely which the initiate must pass beyond in this new phase of the development of his being, of which the 'second birth' was only the starting point.

Certain relationships have naturally to be modified here: the cave becomes once more a 'sepulchre', this time no longer only because it is subterranean, but because the entire cosmos is in a sense the sepulchre from which the being must now come forth. The 'third birth' is necessarily preceded by the 'second death', which is no longer death to the profane world but truly 'death to the cosmos' (and also 'in the cosmos'), and this is why the 'extra-cosmic' birth is always assimilated to a 'resurrection'.[2] In order that this resurrection (which

1. Cf., A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'The Virgin Suckling St Bernard', *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Summer 1970, p. 137.

2. The analogue of all this is found in the symbolism of the chrysalis and of its transformation into a butterfly.

is at the same time the exit from the cave) may take place, it is necessary that the stone which covers the opening of the 'sepulchre' (that is, of the cave itself) be removed. In what follows we will see how this can be represented in certain cases in ritual symbolism.

On the other hand, when what is outside the cave represented only the profane world or the 'outer' darkness, the cave then appeared as the sole illuminated place and, moreover, necessarily illuminated from within, for no light could then come to it from without. Now, since 'extra-cosmic' possibilities have to be taken into account, the cave, despite this illumination, becomes relatively dark in reference, we do not say to whatever is outside it without distinction, but more precisely, to what is above it, beyond its vault, for there indeed is what represents the 'extra-cosmic' domain. In accordance with this new point of view, one could then consider this inner illumination as being only the reflection of a light which penetrates through the 'roof of the world; by the 'solar gateway' or 'sun door' which is the 'eye' of the cosmic vault or the upper opening of the cave. In the microcosm this opening corresponds to the *Brahma-randhra*, that is, to the individual's point of contact with the 'seventh ray' of the spiritual sun,[3] the point which is 'localised' according to organic correspondences, on the crown of the head,[4] and which is also represented by the upper opening of the Hermetic *athanor*.[5] Let us add, in this connection, that the 'philosophical egg' which manifestly plays the part of the 'World Egg', is enclosed within the *athanor*, but that the *athanor* can itself be assimilated to the cosmos in both the macrocosmic and the microcosmic sense. The cave can thus also be identified symbolically with the 'philosophical egg' and with the *athanor* according to the particular degree of development in the initiatic process that is being referred to; but in any case the fundamental meaning of the cave will not be altered in any way on that account.

It is also to be noted that this illumination by reflection takes us back to the Platonic image of the cave, in which only shadows are seen, thanks to a light that comes from without;[6] and this light is indeed extra-cosmic, for its source is the 'intelligible Sun'. The liberation of the prisoners and their exodus from the cave is a 'coming into the daylight' in which they can contemplate directly the reality of which they had hitherto seen merely a reflection. This reality is that of the eternal archetypes, the possibilities contained in the permanent actuality of the immutable Essence.

Finally, it is important to note that the two 'births' we have spoken of, being two successive phases of the full initiation, are also by that very fact,

3. Cf., A. K. Coomaraswamy, *loc cit.*

4. See *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 21.

5. The 'third birth', in alchemical terminology, could be regarded as a 'sublimation'.

6. This obscure sight is the vision *quasi speculum in ænigmate* (as in a mirror darkly) of which St Paul speaks (I Corinthians 13: 12). What appears as manifest in the cosmos is actually only a shadow or a 'vestige' of the transcendent reality but this gives it its value as symbol of this reality.

two stages on one and the same path, and that this path is essentially 'axial', as is also, in its symbolism, the solar ray we have just been alluding to, which indicates the spiritual 'direction' that the being must follow, raising himself unswervingly in order to attain in the end to his true Centre.[7] Within the limits of the microcosm, this axial direction is that of the *sushumnā* which extends all the way to the crown of the head, beyond which it is prolonged 'extra-individually' so to speak, by the solar ray itself that is to be followed in reascending order towards its source. Along the *sushumnā* are the *chakras*, the subtle centres of the individuality, and to some of these correspond the different positions of the *luz* or 'kernel of immortality', which we have considered previously, so that these same positions, or the successive 'awakenings' of the corresponding *chakras*, are always also to be considered as stages on the same axial path. Furthermore, since the World Axis is to be identified naturally with the vertical direction which answers perfectly to this idea of an ascending way, the upper opening, which corresponds microcosmically to the crown of the head, will normally have to be situated at the zenith of the cave, that is at the very summit of the vault. The question is however none the less somewhat complicated in fact owing to two different modalities of symbolism, one polar and the other solar. For this reason some further points must be made in connection with the exit from the cave; these will also serve to illustrate the relationships between the two modalities, the respective predominance of which tallied originally with different cyclic periods but which were subsequently often associated and combined in many different ways.

36 § The Exit from the Cave

ACCORDING to what we have already said, the final exit from the initiatic cave, considered as the 'exit from the cosmos', would seem to be necessarily, in the normal course, through an opening at the very zenith of the vault. It should be remembered that this upper gateway, which traditionally is sometimes designated as the 'solar hub' and also as the 'cosmic eye', corresponds in the human microcosm to the *Brahma-randhra* and to the crown of the head. Nevertheless, despite the references to solar symbolism which are to be found in such a connection, this 'axial' and 'zenithal' position can be said to relate more directly and doubtless more primitively to a polar symbolism. According to certain 'operative' rituals, the point in question is that from which the 'plumb line of the Great Architect' is suspended, marking the direction of the World Axis, and it is then identified with the pole star itself[1]

7. Cf., *aṣ-Ṣirāṭu l-mustaqīm* (the ascending path) in the Islamic tradition.

Let it be noted also that for the exit to be made in this way it is necessary that a stone of the vault be removed from this very point; and this stone, by the fact that it is at the summit, has a special and even unique function in the architectural structure, for it is of course a 'keystone'—a point that is not without its importance, though this is not a context in which it can be dwelt on.[2]

It seems that what we have just mentioned has only seldom been observed to the letter in initiatic rituals, though a few examples of it can nevertheless be found.[3] Moreover, this rarity can be explained, at least in part, by certain practical difficulties and also by the need to avoid confusion, which is a risk in such a case.[4] In fact, if the cave has no way out other than this, it must serve as an entry as well as an exit, which does not conform to its symbolism. Logically, the entrance ought rather to be at a point opposite the exit, along the axis, that is, in the ground at the very centre of the cave, which would be reached by an underground route. But such a means of entry would not be suitable for the 'Greater Mysteries', corresponding as it does only to the initial stage which has already long since been passed. It must be supposed, rather, that the recipient, who has entered by this underground route to receive initiation into the 'Lesser Mysteries', remains in the cave thenceforth until the moment of his 'third birth' when he leaves it once and for all by the upper opening. This is admissible theoretically, but it clearly cannot be put into actual practice.[5]

1. We will recall in this connection that, according to the Far Eastern tradition, the pole star represents the abode of the 'great Unity' (*Tai-i*). At the same time, if normally one must consider the axis as being in a vertical position, as we have just said, it corresponds also to the 'Great Summit' (*Tai-ki*), that is, to the summit of the celestial vault or of the 'roof of the world'. [On the representation of the World Axis by the 'plumb line of the Great Architect of the Universe', see *The Great Triad*, ch. 25.]

2. This relates particularly to the symbolism of Royal Arch Masonry. In the same connection, the reader may also refer to the note at the end of our article on 'Le Tombeau d'Hermès' in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, December 1936.

3. In the high grades of Scottish Masonry, this is observed at the 13th degree, called Royal Arch, but which in spite of certain partial similarities must not be confused with what in English Masonry constitutes Arch Masonry as distinct from Square Masonry. The 'operative' origins of the Scottish grade in question, moreover, are much less clear. The 14th degree or 'Great Scotsman of the sacred Vault' is likewise conferred 'in an underground and vaulted place'. It should be noted in this connection that in these upper grades there are many particulars of diverse provenance which are not always preserved in their entirety or without confusion, so that in their present state it is often quite difficult to determine precisely their real nature.

4. In fact, this confusion exists in the Scottish grades just mentioned: the 'subterranean vault' there, being without 'either doors or windows', one can neither enter nor leave except by the single opening made at the summit of the vault.

5. In a certain sense it can be said that the Lesser Mysteries correspond to the earth (the human state), and the Greater Mysteries to the heavens (the supra-individual states). Thence also, in certain cases, a symbolic correspondence established with the geometrical forms of the square and the circle (or derivatives of these) which the Far Eastern tradition, for example, relates respectively to the earth and the heavens. This distinction is to be found again in the West in the difference between *Square Masonry* and *Arch Masonry*, which we have just mentioned. [On the questions referred to in this note, see *The Great Triad*, ch. 15.]

There is in reality another solution, which implies considerations in which solar symbolism is this time predominant, although the traces of polar symbolism are still quite distinctly in evidence. We have here a kind of combination and almost a fusion of these two modalities, as we indicated at the close of the previous study. It is essential to note in this respect that the vertical axis, insofar as it joins the two poles, is obviously a north-south axis; in the passage from polar to solar symbolism, this axis must somehow be projected onto the zodiacal plane, but in a way that maintains a certain correspondence, we might even say as exact an equivalence as possible, with the primitive polar axis.[6] Now, in the annual cycle the solstices of winter and summer are the two points which correspond respectively to North and South in the spatial order, just as the equinoxes of spring and of autumn correspond to East and West. The axis which fulfills the desired condition, therefore, is that which joins the two solstitial points; and it could be said that this solstitial axis will then play the part of a relatively vertical axis.[7] The solstices are truly what may be called the poles of the year, and these poles of the temporal world (if we may use such an expression) take the place here, in virtue of a correspondence that is real and in no way arbitrary, of the poles of the spatial world. They are, moreover, naturally in direct relation with the course of the sun, whose poles (in the ordinary sense of this word) are, on the contrary, entirely independent; and so the two symbolic modalities in question are linked, as clearly as possible, one with the other.

This being so, the cosmic 'cave' will have two 'zodiacal' gates, set over against one another along the axis that we have just been considering, and they will thus correspond respectively to the two solstitial points of which the one will serve as entry and the other as exit. In fact, the notion of these two 'solstitial gates' is to be found explicitly in most traditions, even to the point of having a considerable symbolic importance generally attached to it. The gate of entry is sometimes designated as the 'gate of men', who are no doubt to be taken in this case as the initiates into the Lesser Mysteries as well as the profane, since they have not yet gone beyond the human state; and the gate of exit is then designated, in contradistinction, as the 'gate of the gods', namely that gate through which pass only those beings who have access to supra-individual states. All that remains to be considered now is which of these two gates corresponds to which solstice; but to be given

6. It is to this same passage from one symbolism to another that the 'transfer' of certain constellations from the polar to the zodiacal region relates, a 'transfer' to which we have alluded elsewhere (see *The Lord of the World*, ch. 10).

7. We need not be concerned here with the fact that among the different traditional forms, there are some which give the yearly cycle a solstitial starting point, and others an equinoctial starting point. We will say only that the reason for the predominance thus attributed to the solstices or to the equinoxes depends on different cyclic periods to which these traditional forms must be more particularly attached.

all the developments that it requires, this question also deserves separate treatment.

37 § The Solstitial Gates

We have said that the zodiac's two gates which are respectively the entry to and exit from the 'cosmic cave', and which certain traditions designate as the 'gate of men' and the 'gate of the gods', inevitably must correspond to the two solstices. We must now state more explicitly that the first corresponds to the summer solstice, that is, to the sign of Cancer, and the second to the winter solstice, or to the sign of Capricorn. In order to understand the reason for this, it is necessary to refer to the division of the annual cycle into two halves, the one 'ascending' and the other 'descending'. The first is the period of the movement of the sun towards the North (*uttarāyana*), going from the winter to the summer solstice; the second is that of the movement of the sun towards the South (*dakshināyana*), going from the summer to the winter solstice.[1] In the Hindu tradition, the ascendant phase relates to the (*deva-yāna*, and the descendant phase to the *pitri-yāna*,[2] which coincides exactly with the designations of the two gateways we have just mentioned. The 'gate of men' is that which gives access to the *pitri-yāna*, and the 'gate of the gods' is that which gives access to the *deva-yāna*. They must therefore be respectively at the outset of the two corresponding phases, that is, the first must be at the summer solstice, and the second at the winter solstice. But in this case it is not really a question of an entry and of an exit, but of two different exits, inasmuch as the point of view is different from that which relates in a special way to the initiatic function of the cave, even though it is perfectly compatible with that function. In fact the 'cosmic cave' is here considered as the place of manifestation of the being. After being manifested here in a certain state, such as the human state for example, this being will go out from it by one of the two gates according to the spiritual degree which it has reached. In one case, that of the *pitri-yāna*, it will have to return to another state of manifestation which naturally will be represented by a re-entry into the 'cosmic cave'. In the other case, on the contrary, that of the *deva-yāna*, there is no further return to the manifested world. One of these two gates is thus both an entry and an exit, while the other is a final exit; but, as regards

1. It should be noted that the Zodiac frequently represented on the portals of medieval churches is arranged in such a way as to indicate clearly this division of the annual cycle.

2. See for example *Bhagavad-Gitā*, 8: 23–26; and cf., *Man and His Becoming according the Vedanta*, ch. 31. An analagous correspondence is to be found in the monthly cycle, the period of the waxing of the moon being similarly related to the *deva-yāna*, and that of the waning moon to the *pitri-yāna*. The four lunar phases can be said to correspond, in a more restricted cycle, to the four solar phases which are the four seasons of the year.

initiation, it is precisely this final departure which is the ultimate goal, so that the being that has entered by the 'gate of men', if it has actually attained this goal, must go out through the 'gate of the gods'.[3]

We have already explained that the solstitial axis of the Zodiac, relatively vertical in relation to the equinoctial axis, must be considered as the projection, in the annual solar cycle, of the North-South polar axis. According to the correspondence of temporal symbolism with the spatial symbolism of the cardinal points, the winter solstice is in a way the north pole of the year and the summer solstice its south pole, while the two equinoxes of spring and autumn correspond in the same way, respectively, to East and West.[4] In Vedic symbolism, however, the gate of the *deva-loka* is situated to the North-east, and that of the *pitri-loka* to the South-west; but this must be considered only as a more explicit indication of the direction in which the course of the annual cycle moves. In conformity with the correspondence we have just mentioned, the 'ascending' period goes from North to East, then from East to South. Similarly, the 'descending' period goes from South to West, then from West to North.[5] It can be said, therefore, with still greater precision, that the 'gateway

3. The 'gate of the gods' cannot be an entry except in the case of voluntary descent into the manifested world, either by a being already 'delivered', or by a being representing the direct expression of a supra-cosmic principle. But is obvious that these exceptional cases are not part of the 'normal' processes that we are considering here. We will only draw attention to the fact that it is easy to understand hereby the reason why the birth of the *Avatāra* is considered as taking place at the time of the winter solstice, the period which is that of Christmas in the Christian tradition.

4. In the day, the ascending half is from midnight to midday, and the descending half from midday to midnight. Midnight corresponds to winter and to the North, midday to summer and to the South. Morning corresponds to springtime and to the East (the side of the rising sun), and the evening to autumn and to the West (the side of the setting sun). Thus, the phases of the day, like those of the month, but on a yet more reduced scale, reproduce analogically those of the year. More generally, it is the same for any cycle which, whatever its extent, is naturally always divided according to the same quaternary law. In harmony with Christian symbolism, the birth of the *Avatāra* takes place not only at the winter solstice but also at midnight. It is doubly in correspondence, therefore, with the 'gateway of the gods'. On the other hand, according to Masonic symbolism, the initiatic work is accomplished 'from midday to midnight', which is no less exact if one considers this work as a movement from the 'gate of men' to the 'gate of the gods'. The objection that one might be tempted to make by reason of the 'descending' nature of this period is resolved by an application of the 'inverse sense' of the analogy, as we shall see below.

5. This relates directly to the question of the direction of ritual circumambulations in different traditional forms. According to the solar modality of the symbolism, this direction is that which we are speaking of here, and the circumambulation is thus accomplished with the centre (about which one constantly turns) on one's right. In the 'polar' modality, it is accomplished in the opposite direction with the centre to one's left. The first case is that of the *pradakshina*, as used in the Hindu and Tibetan traditions. The second case is to be found for example in the Islamic tradition. Perhaps it is not without interest to note that the direction of these circumambulations, going respectively from left to right and from right to left, also corresponds to the direction of the script in the sacred languages of these same traditional forms. In Masonry, in its present form, the direction of the circumambulations is 'solar', but it seems on the contrary to have been 'polar' in the ancient 'operative' ritual, according to which the 'throne of Solomon' was placed to the West and not to the East.

of the gods' is at the North and turned towards the East which is always considered as the side of light and of life, and that the 'gateway of men' is at the South and turned towards the West which, from the same point of view, is considered as the side of darkness and of death; and this gives us the exact definition of 'the two permanent ways of the manifested world, the one light, the other dark. By the one, there is no return (from the non-manifested to the manifested); by the other, one returns again (to manifestation)'.[6]

There remains an appearance of contradiction that still has to be resolved. The North is designated as the highest (*uttara*) point, and it is towards this point moreover that the ascending movement of the sun's orbit is directed, while its descending movement is directed towards the South, which thus appears as the lowest point. But on the other hand, the winter solstice, which in the year corresponds to the North and marks the beginning of the ascending movement, is in a certain sense the lowest point; and the summer solstice, corresponding to the South and where this ascending movement ends, is, according to the same relationship, the highest point, from which the descent will begin subsequently, to be completed at the winter solstice. The solution of this difficulty lies in the distinction that can be made between the 'celestial' order to which the progress of the sun belongs, and the 'terrestrial' order to which belongs the succession of the seasons. According to the general law of analogy, these two orders must be, in their very correlation, the inverse of one another, in such a way that what is highest in the one becomes the lowest in the other, and reciprocally; and it is thus that, according to the Hermetic dictum of the *Emerald Table*, 'that which is above (in the celestial order) is as that which is below (in the terrestrial order)'; or again, according to the Gospel saying, 'the first (in the principial order) are the last (in the manifested order)'.[7] It is true, moreover, that with regard to the 'influences' attached to these points, it is always the North that remains 'benefic', whether it is considered as the point towards which is directed the ascending movement of the sun in the heavens or, in relation to the terrestrial world, as the entrance to the *deva-loka*; and similarly, the South

6. *Bhagavad Gītā* 8: 26. It could be remarked that the clarity and obscurity respectively characterising these two ways correspond exactly to the two complementary principles *yang* and *yin* of the Far Eastern tradition.

7. To this double viewpoint there corresponds, among other applications, the fact that in geographical or other representations, the point situated above may be either North or South. In China, it is the South; and in the Western world it was the same with the Romans and even during a part of the Middle Ages. This practice is, as we have just said, really the most correct as regards the representation of terrestrial things; while, on the contrary, when it is a question of celestial things, it is the North which normally must be placed above. But it goes without saying that the predominance of one or the other of the two points of view, according to the traditional forms or according to the periods, may determine the adoption of a single arrangement for every case indistinctly; and in this respect, the fact of placing the North or the South above, generally appears to be linked especially to the distinction of the two modalities, polar and solar, the point placed above being that which the viewer has before him when he orients himself according to one or the other of these, as we shall explain in the following note.

always remains malefic, whether it is considered as the point towards which the descending movement of the sun in the heavens is directed, or, with regard to the terrestrial world, as the entrance to the *pitri-loka*.[8] It must be added that the terrestrial world can, by transposition, be considered as representing here the whole of the cosmos, and that the heavens, according to the same transposition, will then represent the 'extra-cosmic' domain. From this viewpoint, it is to the 'spiritual' order, understood in its most exalted acceptation, to which must be applied the consideration of the 'invertedness' in relation not only to the world of the senses but to the cosmos in its entirety.[9]

38 § The Symbolism of the Zodiac Among the Pythagoreans

IN treating the question of the solstitial gates, we have referred especially and directly to the Hindu tradition because it is there that the relevant information is most clearly given; but this question in itself is something that is really common to all traditions and evidence of it is to be found in

8. In this connection, let us point out incidentally another case where the same point preserves a constant meaning throughout certain changes that constitute apparent reversals: orientation may be taken according to either one or the other of the two 'polar' or 'solar' modalities of symbolism. In the first, looking at the pole star, that is, turning oneself towards the North, one has the East to the right. In the second, looking at the sun at its meridian, that is turning towards the South, one has the East to the left. These two modalities have been used, for example, in China at different epochs. Thus the side given pre-eminence has been sometimes the right and sometimes the left, but in fact, it has always been the East, that is, the 'side of light'. Let us add that yet other modes of orientation exist, for example, in turning oneself towards the rising sun. It is to this that the Sanskrit designation of the South as *dakshina*, or 'side of the right' refers; and it is also that which was used in the West by the medieval builders to orient churches. [For all questions of orientation which are mentioned in this chapter, see also *The Great Triad*, ch. 7.]

9. To give an example of this application (one, moreover, which is closely related to what we are speaking of here), since the 'culmination' of the visible sun takes place at midday, that of the 'spiritual sun' can be considered symbolically as taking place at midnight. This is why it is said that the initiates of the Greater Mysteries of antiquity 'contemplated the sun at midnight'. From this point of view, night no longer represents the absence or privation of light, but rather its principial state of non-manifestation, which moreover strictly corresponds to the higher meaning of darkness or of the colour black as a symbol of the non-manifested; and it is also in this sense that certain teachings of Islamic esoterism must be understood, according to which 'the night is preferable to the day'. It can be noted also that, if solar symbolism has an obvious relationship with day, polar symbolism for its part has a certain relationship with night; and it is significant in this respect that the 'midnight sun' should have, in the order of sensory phenomena, its literal representation in the Hyperborean regions, that is, the very place of origin of the Primordial Tradition.

Western antiquity as well as in Hinduism. In Pythagoreanism, especially, zodiacal symbolism seems to have had just as considerable an importance. The expressions 'gateway of men' and 'gateway of the gods', which we have used, belong, moreover, to the Greek tradition. Only the information on these topics that has come down to us is so fragmentary and incomplete that their interpretation can give rise to many confusions which those who have considered them in isolation and without clarifying them by comparison with other traditions have not failed to commit, as we shall see.

First of all, in order to avoid certain ambiguities with regard to the respective positions of the two gates, what we have said about the application of the 'inversion' must be remembered according to whether they are considered in relation to the terrestrial order of things or to the celestial order. The solstitial gate of winter, or the sign of Capricorn, corresponds to the North in the annual cycle, but to the South as regards the path of the sun in the heavens; similarly, the summer solstitial gate, or the sign of Cancer, corresponds to the South in the annual cycle and to the North as regards the path of the sun. This is why, while the ascendant movement of the sun goes from South to North, and its descendant movement from North to South, the ascendant period of the year must be regarded, on the contrary, as being accomplished in moving from North to South and its descendant period in moving from South to North, as we have already said. It is in relation to this last viewpoint that, according to the Vedic symbolism, the gateway of the *deva-loka* is situated towards the North, and that of the *pitri-loka* towards the South, without there being in all this, despite appearances, the least contradiction with what we are now going to find elsewhere.

We will quote, with the necessary explanations and rectifications, the summing up of Pythagorean information on this subject given by Jerome Carcopino.[1] 'The Pythagoreans', he says, 'had constructed a whole theory on the relation of the Zodiac with the migration of souls. How far back does this go? It is impossible to know. The fact remains that in the second century of our era, it blossomed forth in the writings of the Pythagorean Numenius to which we have access through a dry and late summary of Proclus, in his commentary on the Republic of Plato, and through an analysis, both fuller and older, by Porphyry in chapters 21 and 22 of *De Antro Nympharum*.' We have here, be it said at once, a typical example of 'historicism': the truth is that it is in no way a question of a theory 'constructed' more or less artificially, at such and such a date, by the Pythagoreans or by others in the way of a mere philosophical view or of an individual conception of any kind. It is a question of traditional knowledge concerning an initiatic reality which by the very reason of its traditional nature has not and cannot have any chronologically assignable origin. These are considerations, of course, that may elude

1. *La Basilique pythagoricienne de la Porte Majeure*. Not having the book at hand, we quote from the article published earlier, under the same title, in *La Revue des Deux Mondes* (issue of 15 November 1926).

a 'scholar'; but he must be able to understand this at least: if the theory in question had been 'constructed by the Pythagoreans', how then are we to explain that it is to be found everywhere, beyond any Greek influence, and in particular in the Vedic texts which assuredly are very much earlier than Pythagoreanism? Carcopino, as a 'specialist' in Greco-Latin antiquity, may well be ignorant of this, unfortunately; but according to what he himself relates in what follows, this idea is already to be found in Homer. Even among the Greeks, therefore, it was known not only before Numenius, which is all too obvious, but before Pythagoras himself. It is a traditional teaching which was transmitted continuously down through the centuries; and the somewhat 'late' date at which certain authors—who invented nothing and did not claim to have done so—formulated the doctrine in writing is of little importance.

Let us now return to Proclus and Porphyry: 'Our two authors agree in attributing to Numenius the determination of the extreme points of the heavens, the tropic of winter under the sign of Capricorn, and the tropic of summer under that of Cancer, and, evidently following him and the 'theologians' whom he cites and who served him as guides, they agree in defining Cancer and Capricorn as the two gateways to the heavens. Whether it was to descend into generation or to re-ascend to God, souls thus had necessarily to pass through one of them'. By 'extreme points of the heavens', too elliptical an expression to be perfectly clear in itself, we must naturally understand the extreme points reached by the sun in its annual course, where it stops as it were—whence the name 'solstices'. It is to these solstitial points that the 'gateways of the heavens' correspond, which is indeed exactly the traditional doctrine which we already know. As we have indicated elsewhere,[2] these two points sometimes were symbolised—for example, under the tripod at Delphi and under the feet of the steeds of the solar chariot—by the octopus and the dolphin which represent respectively Cancer and Capricorn. On the other hand, it goes without saying that the authors in question were not able to attribute to Numenius the actual determination of the solstitial points, which were known at all times. They simply referred to Numenius as one of those who had spoken of these points prior to themselves and who had himself referred to other 'theologians'.

It is a question next of specifying the real function of each of the two gates and it is here that the confusion is going to become apparent: 'According to Proclus, Numenius had narrowly differentiated them: by the gate of Cancer, the fall of souls to the earth; by that of Capricorn, the ascension of souls into the ether. With Porphyry, on the contrary, it is said only that Cancer is to the North and favourable to the descent, and Capricorn to the South and favourable to the ascent: so that instead of being strictly subject to a "one way" path, souls would have kept a certain freedom of circulation, to go and to return.' The end of this quotation really expresses nothing but an interpretation for which the sole responsibility is Carcopino's. We do not see at all why what Porphyry says is

2. 'Some Aspects of the Symbolism of the Fish' [24 above].

contrary to what was said by Proclus. It may be formulated somewhat more vaguely, but it seems, indeed, to say basically the same thing. What is 'favourable' to the descent or to the ascent must doubtless be understood as that which makes it possible; for it is hardly likely that Porphyry would have wished to leave the impression of any kind of indeterminacy which, being incompatible with the rigorous nature of traditional science, would in any case be nothing but a proof of his ignorance on this point. However that may be, it is obvious that Numenius only repeated the known traditional teaching on the function of the two gates. On the other hand, if he places Cancer to the North and Capricorn to the South, as Porphyry indicated, it is because he is considering their situation in the heavens. This is indicated quite clearly, moreover, by the fact that in what is said earlier, it is a question of the 'tropics', which can only have a spatial meaning, and not of the 'solstices', which on the contrary relate more directly to the annual cycle; and this is why the situation given here is the inverse of that given by Vedic symbolism, without it making any real difference, since we have here two equally legitimate points of view which agree perfectly once their relationship is understood.

We are now about to see something still more extraordinary: Carcopino goes on to say that 'it is difficult, in the absence of the original, to disentangle from these divergent allusions'—not really divergent except in his mind—'the true doctrine of Numenius', which, as we have seen, is not his own doctrine but simply the teaching reported by him, which makes it all the more important and more worthy of interest. 'But it is evident from the context of Porphyry that, even expounded in its most elastic form'—as if there could be 'elasticity' in a question that is solely a matter of exact knowledge—'it would remain in contradiction with those of some of his predecessors, and in particular with the system that the older Pythagoreans had based on their interpretation of verses of the *Odyssey* where Homer described the grotto of Ithaca', that is, the 'cave of the Nymphs' which is nothing other than one of the figurations of the 'cosmic cave' of which we have spoken earlier. 'Homer, Porphyry observes, did not limit himself to saying that this grotto had two gates. He specified that one of them faced to the North, and the other, more divine, faced South; and that one descended by the northern gateway. But he has not indicated whether one could descend by the southern gateway. He says only: it is the entry of the gods. Never does man take the path of the immortals'. We believe that this must be the very text of Porphyry, and we do not see in it the announced contradiction. But here is the commentary of Carcopino: 'By this exegesis, one perceives, in this epitome of the universe which the cave of the Nymphs is, the two gates which open to the heavens and under which the souls pass; and, contrary to what Proclus ascribes to Numenius, it is that of the North, Capricorn, which was at first reserved for the departure of souls; and that of the South, Cancer, that was consequently assigned for their return to God'.

Now that we have completed the citation, we can understand that the asserted contradiction, here again, is only of Carcopino's making. In fact, in the last phrase there is a manifest error and even a double error, which

seems truly inexplicable. First of all, it is Carcopino who on his own initiative mentions Capricorn and Cancer. According to Porphyry, Homer only designates the two gates by their situation to the North and the South, without indicating the corresponding zodiacal signs. But as he indicates that the 'divine' gate is that of the South, it must be inferred that it is this one which for him corresponds to Capricorn just as for Numenius, which means that he also situates these gates according to their position in the heavens, which thus appears to have been the dominant point of view throughout the Greek tradition, even before Pythagoreanism. Next, the exit of souls from the cosmos and their 'return to God' are in fact one and the same thing, so that Carcopino, apparently without perceiving it, attributes the same function to each gate. Homer, on the contrary, says that it is by the northern gate that the 'descent' is made, that is, the entry into the 'cosmic cave', or in other words, into the world of generation or of individual manifestation. As to the southern gateway, it is the exit from the cosmos, and consequently it is through it that the 'ascent' of beings on the way to liberation is accomplished. Homer does not say expressly if one can also descend by this gate, but that is not necessary, for in designating it as the 'entry of the gods', he tells us clearly enough what are the exceptional 'descents' which are made thereby, as we have explained in our previous study. Finally, whether the situation of the two gates be looked at in relation to the movement of the sun in the heavens as in the Greek tradition, or in relation to the seasons in the annual terrestrial cycle, as in the Hindu tradition, it is clearly always Cancer which is the 'gateway of men' and Capricorn which is the 'gateway of the gods'. There can be no variation on this point, and in fact there is none. It is only the incomprehension of modern 'academics' who credit themselves with the discovery, in the various interpreters of traditional doctrines, of divergences and contradictions which are not really there at all.

39 § The Solstitial Symbolism of Janus

WE have just seen that the symbolism of the two solstitial gateways existed in the West among the Greeks and, more especially, among the Pythagoreans. It was to be found likewise among the Latins, where it was linked essentially to the symbolism of Janus; and as we have already referred many time to this symbolism and its diverse aspects, we will consider here only those points that are more directly related to the last chapters, though it may be difficult to isolate them entirely from the very complex totality of which they form part.

Janus, under the aspect now in question, is the *janitor* who opens and closes the doors (*januæ*) of the annual cycle with the keys which are one of his principle attributes; and we recall in this connection that the key is an axial symbol. The

doors themselves are none other than the solstitial gates of which we have spoken. There can be no doubt about this; in fact, Janus has given his name to the month of January (*januarius*), the first month of the year, that with which it opens when it begins, as is normal at the winter solstice. Moreover, and this makes it still clearer, the feast of Janus at Rome was celebrated at the two solstices by the *Collegia Fabrorum* (the Guilds of the Artisans); and we shall shortly have to dwell on this point at greater length. Janus has already been mentioned as 'Master of threefold time' (an appellation applied likewise to *Shiva* by the Hindu tradition) and also as 'Master of the two ways', those of the right and of the left, which the Pythagoreans represented by the letter Y, and which are fundamentally identical with the *deva-yāna* and the *pitri-yāna*; and as regards the symbolism of the two ways, it should be added that there is a third, the 'middle way', which leads directly to Deliverance, and to which would correspond the undrawn upper prolongation of the vertical part of the letter Y; and this, again, is to be compared to what was said above about the third and invisible countenance of Janus (see p. 90).

The fact that Janus was the god of initiation is most important, not only in itself but also from out present standpoint, because there is an evident connection here with what we have said about the obviously initiatic function of the cave and of the other 'images of the world' which are its equivalents, and that is precisely what has brought us to consider the question of the solstitial gates. Furthermore, it is on this basis that Janus presided over the *Collegia Fabrorum*, these being the trustees of the initiations which, as in all traditional civilisations, were linked to the practice of the crafts; and what is altogether remarkable is that we have here something which, far from having disappeared with the ancient Roman civilisation, continued on without interruption into Christianity itself, and of which traces can still be found in our day, however strange that may appear to those who are ignorant about certain 'transmissions'.

In Christianity, the solstitial feasts of Janus became those of the two Saint Johns, and these are always celebrated at the same period, that is, within the immediate vicinity of the two solstices of winter and of summer;[1] and it is significant also that the esoteric aspect of the Christian tradition has always been considered as 'johannite', which confers on this fact a meaning that clearly goes beyond the simply religious and exoteric domain, whatever

1. The winter feast of St John [that is, St John the Apostle] is thus quite near the feast of Christmas which, from another point of view, corresponds no less exactly to the winter solstice, as previously explained. A thirteenth century window of the Church of St Remy at Rheims offers a particularly interesting and no doubt exceptional representation in connection with what we are considering here. The question of which of the two Saint Johns it represents has been discussed rather vainly. The truth is that, without there being any need to see in it the least confusion, it represents both, synthesized in the figure of a single individual, as is shown by the two sunflowers, facing in opposite directions, above his head, and corresponding to the two solstices and to the two faces of Janus. Let it be noted incidentally, as a curiosity, that the popular expression 'John who weeps and John who laughs' is really as it were an echo of the two opposite faces of Janus [cf., note 3 of the following chapter].

may be the outward appearances. The guilds moreover were made, by regular transmission, the successors of the ancient *Collegia Fabrorum*, and throughout the Middle Ages they maintained the same initiatic status. This applies in particular to the guild of the builders, which thus naturally had as patrons the two Saint Johns, whence the well-known expression of 'Lodge of St John' which has been preserved by Masonry, this in itself being nothing but the continuation by direct filiation of the organisations we have just mentioned.[2] Even under its modern 'speculative' form, Masonry has likewise always kept, as one of the more explicity testimonies of its origin, the solstitial feasts consecrated to the two Saint Johns, these feasts having been consecrated to the two faces of Janus previously; and it is thus that the traditional lore of the two solstitial gates, with its initiatic connections, has been maintained, still living even if greatly misunderstood, down to the modern Western world.

40 § Concerning the Two Saint Johns

EVEN though summer is generally considered as a joyful season and winter as a sad one, by the fact that the first represents in a way the triumph of light and the second that of darkness, the two corresponding solstices none the less have an exactly opposite significance. This may seem to be a rather strange paradox, but it is quite easy to understand that it should be so, once one has some knowledge of traditional teaching about the course of the annual cycle. Indeed, what has attained its maximum can thenceforth only diminish; and what has come to its minimum, on the contrary, can only begin

2. We note that the 'Lodge of St John', though not assimilated symbolically to the cave, is none the less, like it, a representation of the cosmos. The description of its 'dimensions' is particularly clear in this respect: its length is 'from East to West', its breadth 'from South to North', its height 'from Heaven to Earth', and its depth 'from the surface of the Earth to its Centre'. It may be noted, as a remarkable correspondence which has to do with the height of the Lodge, that according to the Islamic tradition, the site of a mosque is considered as consecrated not only at the surface of the earth, but from the earth to the 'seventh Heaven'. On the other hand, it is said that 'in the Lodge of St John, temples are raised for virtue and dungeons are dug for vice'. These two ideas of 'raising' and 'digging' relate to the two vertical dimensions, heights and depth, which are reckoned according to the two halves of a single axis running from 'Zenith to Nadir', taken in an inverse direction from one another. These two opposite directions correspond respectively to *sattva* and to *tamas* (the expansion of the two horizontal dimensions corresponding to *rajas*), that is, to the two tendencies of the being, towards the Heavens (the temple) and towards the Hells (the dungeon), tendencies which are 'allegorised' here rather than symbolised strictly speaking, by the notions of 'virtue' and 'vice', just as in the above mentioned myth of Hercules.

to increase forthwith.[1] This is why the summer solstice marks the start of the descending half of the year, and the winter solstice, conversely, that of its ascending half; and it is also what explains, from the point of view of its cosmic meaning, this saying of St John the Baptist, whose birth coincides with the summer solstice: 'He must increase, but I must decrease'.[2] It is known that in the Hindu tradition, the ascending phase of the year is related to the *deva-yāna*, and the descending phase to the *pitri-yāna*. Consequently, in the Zodiac, the sign of Cancer, corresponding to the summer solstice, is the 'gate of men', which gives access to the *pitri-yāna*; and the sign of Capricorn, which corresponds to the winter solstice, is the 'gate of the gods', which gives access to the *deva-yāna*. In reality, it is the ascending half of the annual cycle that is the 'joyful' period, that is, benefic or favourable; and it is the descending half that is the 'sad', that is, malefic or unfavourable period; and the same may naturally be said of the solstitial gateway which opens each of these periods into which the year is divided by the very direction of the sun's movement.[3]

In Christianity the feasts of the two Saint Johns are directly related to the two solstices;[4] and what is rather remarkable, though we have not seen it noted anywhere, is that the descent and ascent that we have just mentioned are in a way expressed by the double meaning of the name John[5] itself. In fact, the Hebrew word *hanan* has at the same time the sense of 'benevolence' and of 'mercy', and that of 'praise' (and it is at least curious to note that in French itself words like *grâce* and *merci* have exactly the same double meaning). Thus the name *Jahanan* can mean both 'mercy of God' and also 'praise to God'. Now it is easy to appreciate that the first of these two meanings seems to agree particularly well with St John the Baptist, and the second with St John the Evangelist. Furthermore, it can be said that mercy is obviously descending

1. This idea is to be found, for example, at several points in the *Tao-te-King*. In the Far Eastern tradition, it is related particularly to the vicissitudes of *yin* and *yang*.

2. *John* 3: 30.

3. [It hardly needs emphasis that when the author speaks of the direction of the sun's movement, he refers to its apparent movement in its annual journey through the constellations of the Zodiac, as determined by a terrestrial perspective. That it so appears, and that despite appearances the sun actually remains in the centre—both are undeniable scientific facts and both are symbolic, the one of the Divinity as All-Encompasser and the other of the Divinity as Centre. Tr.]

4. Actually, they are placed a little after the exact dates of the two solstices [St John, Apostle and Evangelist, December 27, and St John the Baptist, June 24—these dates being those of the traditional Roman calendar. Tr.] which makes their significance still more apparent, for the descent and ascent have then actually begun. To this corresponds, in Vedic symbolism, the fact that the gates of the *pitri-loka* and of the *deva-loka* are said to be situated respectively, not exactly at the South and the North, but towards the Southwest and the Northeast.

5. We are speaking here of the etymological sense of this name in Hebrew. As to the likeness of John and Janus, it is of course a phonetic assimilation which obviously has no relation to etymology, but which is none the less important from a symbolic point of view, as the feasts of the two Saint Johns have in fact taken the places of those of Janus at the two solstices of summer and winter.

and that praise is ascending, which brings us again to their correlation with the two halves of the annual cycle.[6]

In relation to the two Saint Johns and their solstitial symbolism, it is of interest to consider a symbol which seems peculiar to Masonry in the Anglo-Saxon world, or which at least has only been preserved in that Masonry. This is a circle with a point in the centre, placed between two parallel tangents; and these tangents are said to represent the two Saint Johns. In fact, the circle is here the annual cycle, and its solar significance is made more evident by the presence of the central point, for this same figure is also the astrological sign of the sun. The two parallel lines are tangents of the circle at the solstitial points, which they thus define as 'limit points', these points being in fact bounds beyond which the sun can never pass in the course of its journey. It is because the lines thus correspond to the two solstices that they can also be said to represent precisely the two Saint Johns. Nevertheless, there is in this representation an anomaly, at least an apparent one: the solstitial diameter of the annual cycle, as we have explained on other occasions, must be considered as relatively vertical in relation to the equinoctial diameter, and moreover it is only so that the two halves of the cycle, going from one solstice to the other, can really be seen as ascendant and descendant, respectively, the two solstitial points then being the highest and lowest points of the circle. This means that the tangents to the two extremities of the solstitial diameter, since they are perpendicular to it, will necessarily be horizontal. But in the symbol we are now considering, the two tangents are, on the contrary, represented as vertical. In this special case, therefore, a certain modification has been brought to the general symbolism of the annual cycle, one that is moreover easy enough to explain, for it is obvious that it could only have been introduced by an assimilation established between the two parallel lines and another double symbol, that of the two columns.[7] The columns, which by their nature can only be vertical, have thereby, as well as by their being respectively to the North and South, a real relationship with solstitial symbolism, at least from a certain point of view.

This aspect of the two columns is seen with particular clarity in the case of the symbol of the 'pillars' of Hercules.[8] The 'solar hero' aspect of Hercules and the zodiacal correspondence of his twelve labours are too well known to require emphasis; and it goes without saying that it is precisely this solar character that justifies the solstitial significance of the two columns to which

6. We will recall again the well-known though doubtless little understood figure of 'John who weeps and John who laughs', relating it particularly to the ideas of 'sadness' and of 'joy' mentioned above. This is basically a representation equivalent to that of the two faces of Janus. 'John who weeps' is he who implores the mercy of God, that is to say, St John the Baptist; and 'John who laughs' is he who offers Him praise, that is St John the Evangelist.

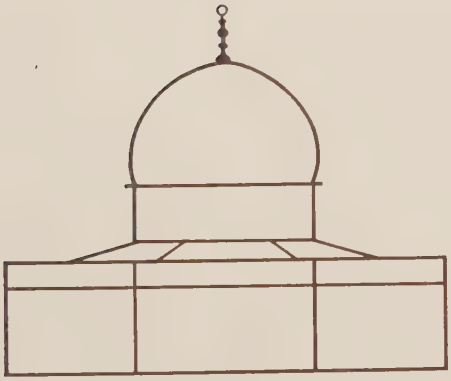
7. [The two 'columns' of the Church are St Peter and St Paul, see below, 45, note 5. Ed.]

8. In the geographical representation which places these two pillars on either side of the actual straits of Gibraltar, it is obvious that it is the one situated in Europe which is the column of the North, and that situated in Africa which is the column of the South.

his name is attached. This being so, the motto *ne plus ultra* which is related to these pillars, is seen to have a double meaning. It expresses not only the usual terrestrial interpretation, valid in its own order, to the effect that the pillars mark the limit beyond which, for reasons which might well make an interesting object of research, voyagers were forbidden to pass. But the motto indicates at the same time, and no doubt we should say above all, that from the celestial point of view, these are the limits that the sun cannot overpass and between which, as between the two tangents mentioned just now, its annual journey is accomplished.[9] These last considerations may seem quite far from our starting point, but it is not really so, for they contribute to the explanation of a symbol that is related expressly to the two Saint Johns. Moreover, in the Christian form of the tradition, one may say that all that concerns solstitial symbolism is also by that fact in more or less direct relationship with these two Saints.

9. A representation of the pillars of Hercules can be seen on ancient Spanish coins, in which they are joined by a kind of streamer on which *ne plus ultra* is inscribed. Now a fact which seems little enough known, and which we mention here only as a curiosity, is that the usual sign of the American dollar is derived from this figure. But here, all the importance has been given to the streamer, which originally was only an accessory and which has been changed into the letter S whose form it approximated, while the two columns which constituted the essential element were reduced to two parallel strokes, vertical like the two tangents to the circle in Masonic symbolism, which we have just now explained. This is not without a certain irony, for in fact it was precisely the discovery of America that annulled the ancient geographical relevance of the *ne plus ultra*.

The Symbolism of Building



41 § The Symbolism of the Dome

In an article in *The Indian Historical Quarterly* (March 1938), Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has studied the symbolism of the dome, which is too important and too closely linked to certain considerations that we ourselves have previously developed for us not to examine the chief aspects more closely. The first essential point to note in this respect, in connection with the symbolic and initiatic value of architectural art, is that every edifice built according to strictly traditional rules, has in its structure and in the disposition of its different parts a 'cosmic' meaning which can be understood in two ways in conformity with the analogical relationship between macrocosm and microcosm. It refers, that is, both to the world and to man at the same time. In the first place, this is naturally true of temples and other buildings that have a 'sacred' purpose in the most precise sense of this word. But beyond this, it is true even for ordinary human habitations; for it must not be forgotten that in reality there is nothing 'profane' in wholly traditional civilisations, so much so that it is only as the result of a profound degeneration that houses have come to be built with no more in view than the purely material needs of their occupants, and that the occupants, for their part, should be content with dwellings conceived according to such narrowly and meanly utilitarian preoccupations.

It goes without saying that the above mentioned 'cosmic' signification can be achieved in many ways, corresponding to as many points of view, which thus will give rise to different architectural 'types' of which some will be especially linked to this or that traditional form. But for the moment we need only consider a single one of these 'types' which, moreover, appears to be one of the most fundamental and which, for this very reason, is also one of the most widespread. The structure in question consists essentially of a square base (it is of no importance in the present context whether this lower part is cubical or more or less elongated), surmounted by a dome or a cupola that is more or less rigorously hemispherical in form. Among the most typical examples, we may mention, with Coomaraswamy, the Buddhist *stūpa*, and also the Islamic *qubbah*, the general form of which is exactly comparable.[1] Likewise to be mentioned are those Christian churches in which a

1. The purpose of the two edifices is correspondingly similar because the *stūpa*, originally at least, was built to house relics; and the *qubbah* is erected over the tomb of a *walī* (Saint).

cupola is raised above the central part,[2] as well as other cases where this structure may not be so clearly distinguishable at first sight. It is to be noted also that an arch, with its two rectilinear pillars and the soffit which rests on them, is really nothing other than the vertical cross section of such a structure, and in this arch, the keystone at its summit obviously corresponds to the highest part of the dome. We will come back later to the real significance of that point.[3]

It is easy to see, first of all, that the two parts of the structure we have just described represent earth and heaven, to which in fact the square and circular forms respectively correspond (or the cubic and spherical forms in three dimensional construction); and though it is in the Far Eastern tradition that most stress is laid on this correspondence, it is far from belonging to it exclusively.[4] As we have just alluded to the Far Eastern tradition, it is not without interest to note in this connection that in China the attire of the ancient Emperors had to be round at the top and square at the bottom. This attire, in fact, had a symbolic meaning (just as did all the actions of their lives, which were ritually regulated) and this meaning was precisely the same as the one we are now considering in its architectural realisation.[5] Let it be added at once that if, as regards building, the entire construction be

2. If the church has the overall form of a Latin cross, as is most commonly the case [except in Eastern Christianity, where other forms are dominant, eg, the domed cube, the 'cross-in-square', or even octagonal or circular plans, according to period and area. Tr.], it is to be noted that this cross can be obtained by the opening out of a cube, the faces of which are folded down onto the plane of its base (this is expressly indicated in Masonic *Royal Arch* symbolism); the plane of the base, which naturally remains in its primary position, then corresponds to the central part above which the cupola is erected.

3. In certain representations belonging to Royal Arch Masonry, the 'celestial' meaning of the soffit is formally indicated by the delineation on it of a part of the Zodiac, one of the 'solstitial gates' being placed on the keystone. Moreover, the 'gateway' normally would have to differ according to whether the point in question is considered as an 'entry' or an 'exit', in conformity with what we have explained above.

4. In Masonic initiation, the passage *from square to arch* represents a passage from 'Earth to Heaven' (whence the term *exaltation* to designate admission to the grade of *Royal Arch*), that is from the 'Lesser Mysteries' to the 'Greater Mysteries' with, in the case of the latter, the dual 'sacerdotal' and 'royal' aspects, for the complete corresponding title is *Holy (and) Royal Arch*, even though, for historical reasons which need not be gone into here, the 'sacerdotal art' has in the end been largely supplanted by the 'royal art'. The circular and square forms are also called to mind by the compass and try-square, which serve respectively to plot these two figures, and which are taken together as symbols of two complementary principles as are, in fact, Heaven and Earth [cf. *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 20; and *The Great Triad*, ch. 3].

5. The Emperor himself, being thus clothed, represented 'true Man', mediator between Heaven and Earth, the respective powers of which he united in his own nature; and it is in exactly the same sense that a master Mason (who would also be 'true Man' if he had effectively realised his initiation) 'is always placed between square and compass'. As regards this subject, let us note also one of the aspects of the symbolism of the turtle: the lower shell, which is flat, corresponds to the Earth, while the upper shell, which is rounded in the form of a dome, corresponds to Heaven. The animal itself, between the two shells, represents Man between Heaven and Earth, thus completing the 'Great Triad' which plays a particularly important part in the symbolism of Taoist initiatic organisations [cf., *The Great Triad* ch. 14 and 15].

considered as hypogean or underground as in fact it sometimes is, literally in certain cases and symbolically in others, we are brought back to the symbolism of the cave as image of the entire cosmos.

To this general meaning another yet more precise is to be added: the whole edifice, viewed from top to bottom, represents the passage from principial Unity (to which the central point or summit of the dome corresponds, and of which the whole vault is as it were only an expansion) to the quaternary of elemental manifestation;[6] inversely, from below upwards, it is the return of this manifestation to Unity. In this connection Coomaraswamy recalls as having the same meaning, the Vedic symbolism of the three *Ribhus* who, from the single cup (*pātra*) of *Twashtri* made four cups (and it goes without saying that the form of the cup is hemispherical, like that of the dome). The ternary number, intervening here as intermediary between Unity and quaternity, signifies in this case that it is only by means of the three dimensions of space that the original 'one' can be made 'four', which is exactly represented by the three dimensional cross. The inverse process is likewise represented by the legend of the Buddha who, having received four bowls of alms from the *Maharajas* of the four cardinal points, made of them a single bowl, which indicates that for the 'unified' being, the 'Grail' (to use the Western traditional term which obviously designates the equivalent of this *pātra*) is once more single as it was at the beginning, that is, at the starting point of cosmic manifestation.[7]

Before going further, let it be noted that the structure in question can also be realised horizontally: to a rectangular edifice a semicircular part is added by the projection of the foundation plan at one of its extremities, the one that lies in the direction to which a celestial influence is ascribed. In the most widely known cases, at least, this will be the direction from which the light comes, that is, the East; and the example that comes most immediately to mind is that of a church ending in a semicircular apse. Another example is provided by the complete form of a Masonic temple: it is known that the lodge, strictly speaking, is a 'long square', that is, really a double square, the length (from East to West) being the double of the width (North to South);[8] but to this double square, which is the *Hikal*, the *Debir* is added at the East, in the form

6. The crucial plan of a church is likewise a quaternary form; the numerical symbolism, therefore, remains the same in this case just as in that of the square base.

7. On the subject of the *Twashtri* and the three *Ribhus* [We have followed Guénon's transliteration here, though the forms more likely to be used by Anglophone Indologists today would be *Tvaṣṭṛ* and *Ṛbhus* Tr.] considered as a triad of 'artists', let us note that in the rules established by the Hindu Tradition for the construction of a building one finds in a way their correspondence in the architect (*sthapati*) and his three companions or assistants, the land surveyor (*sutragrāhi*), the mason (*vardhaki*), and the carpenter (*takshaka*). Equivalents to this ternary could be found again in Masonry where, moreover, under an inverse aspect, it becomes that of the murderous 'bad companions' of Hiram.

8. According to the *Critias* of Plato, the great temple of Poseidon, capital of Atlantis, had as base a double square; if the side of the square is taken as unity, the diagonal of the double square equals $\sqrt{5}$.

of a semicircle;[9] and this, moreover, is exactly the plan of the Roman basilica.[10]

Let us now return to vertical structure: as Coomaraswamy remarks, this must be considered, in its entirety, in relation to a central axis; it is obviously so in the case of a hut with a dome shaped roof supported by a post joining the summit of this roof with the earth; it is also the same in the case of certain *stupas* in which the axis is represented inside the structure, sometimes being prolonged upwards even beyond the dome. Nevertheless, it is not necessary for the axis always to be represented materially, any more than the World Axis, of which it is the image, is in fact materially represented in any place whatsoever; what matters is that the centre of the ground space occupied by the edifice, that is, the point situated directly beneath the summit of the dome, should be always virtually identified with the 'Centre of the World'. This, in fact, is not a 'place' in the topographical and literal sense of the word, but rather in a transcendent and principial sense; and consequently it can be realised in every centre that is regularly established and consecrated, whence the necessity of the rites which make the construction of a building a true imitation of the very formation of the world.[11] The point in question is therefore a true *omphalos* (*nābhih prithivyāh*). In very many cases it is at this point that an altar or a hearth is placed, according to whether the edifice is a temple or a dwelling. The altar, moreover, is really also a hearth; and, inversely, in a traditional civilisation, the hearth must be regarded as a true domestic altar. Symbolically, it is there that the manifestation of *Agni* takes place; and in this respect, we will recall what we have said of the birth of the *Avatāra* at the centre of the initiatic cave, for it is obvious that the meaning here is again the same, and it is only the application that is different. When an opening is made at the summit of the dome, it is through this that the smoke rising from the hearth escapes to the outside; but far from having only a purely utilitarian reason, as men of today might imagine, that likewise has on the contrary a very profound symbolic meaning which we will now examine, making still clearer the exact significance, both macrocosmic and microcosmic, of the summit of the dome.

9. In the Temple of Solomon, the *Hikal* was the 'Holy' and the *Debir* was the 'Holy of Holies'.

10. In a mosque, the *miḥrāb*, which is a semicircular niche, corresponds to the apse of a church, and it also indicates the *qiblah*, that is, the ritual orientation; but here this orientation, being directed towards a centre which is a definite point on the surface of the earth, naturally varies according to location.

11. Sometimes the dome itself may not exist in the actual construction without however the symbolic meaning being thereby altered. We have in mind the traditional type of house arranged as a square around an inner courtyard. The central part is then open to the sky but, precisely, it is the celestial vault itself which in this case plays the part of a natural dome. In this connection, incidentally, there is a certain relation, in a given traditional form, between the arrangement of the house and the constitution of the family. Thus in the Islamic tradition, the quadrilateral ordering of the house (which normally should be entirely closed outside, all the windows opening onto the inner courtyard) is connected with the limitation of the numbers of wives to four at most, each of them having for her own domain one of the sides of the quadrilateral.

42 § The Dome and the Wheel

We know that the wheel is, in a general way, a symbol of the world, the circumference representing manifestation, which is produced by the irradiation of the centre. This symbolism naturally admits of more or less particularised meanings, for instead of being applied to the whole of universal manifestation, it can be applied also to no more than a certain domain of it. A particularly important example is when two wheels are taken together to denote two different parts of the whole cosmos. This relates to the symbolism of the chariot, so often to be met with in the Hindu tradition. Ananda Coomaraswamy has explained this symbolism on several occasions, and has done so yet again, in connection with the *chhatra* and the *ushnīsha*, in an article in *The Poona Orientalist* (April 1938) from which we will borrow some of the considerations which follow.

By reason of this symbolism, the construction of a chariot amounts strictly to the 'artisanal' realisation of a cosmic model, as does the architectural construction of which we have just been speaking. We need hardly recall that it is in virtue of considerations of this order that crafts in a traditional civilisation possess a spiritual value and a truly sacred character, and that it is because of this that they can normally serve as supports for initiation. Moreover, there is an exact parallelism between the two constructions in question, as is to be seen at once from the fact that the fundamental element of the chariot is the axle (*aksha*, identical with 'axis'), which in this case represents the World Axis and which is thus the equivalent of the central pillar (*skambha*) of a building to which everything in the whole edifice must be referred. Moreover, it is of little importance, as we have said, whether or not this pillar is represented materially; certain texts have it that the axle of the cosmic chariot is only a 'separative breath' (*vyāna*) which, occupying the intermediate space (*antariksha*, explained as *antaryaksha*), maintains Heaven and Earth in their respective 'places',[1] and which, while separating them, also unites them as a bridge (*setu*) and makes possible the passage from one to the other.[2] The two wheels, which are placed at the extremities of the axle, then in fact represent Heaven and Earth; and the axle extends from one to the other, just as the central pillar reaches from the earth to the summit of the vault. Between these two wheels and supported by the axle is the 'box' (*kosha*) of the chariot, the flooring of which, from another point of view, also corresponds to the Earth; the body formed by the two sides corresponds to the intermediate space, and the roof corresponds to Heaven. The square or rectangular floor of the cosmic chariot

1. In the Far Eastern tradition, the comparison of Heaven and Earth to the two boards of a bellows corresponds exactly to this. In the Hebrew tradition, the *antariksha* is also the 'firmament in the midst of the waters', separating the 'lower waters' from the 'upper waters' (Genesis 1:6). The idea expressed in Latin by the word *firmamentum*, corresponds, furthermore, to the 'adamantine' character frequently attributed to the World Axis.

2. One finds here very clearly the two meanings of the *barzakh* of the Islamic tradition.

and its dome-shaped roof bring us back to the architectural structure that was the theme of the last chapter.

If the two wheels are taken to represent Heaven and Earth, it might be objected, since both are circular, that the difference of the geometric forms that most normally correspond to them is no longer in evidence in this case; but a certain change of viewpoint here is altogether admissible, inasmuch as the circular form is in any case justified as symbolising the cyclical revolutions to which all manifestation, 'terrestrial' as well as 'celestial', is subject. In a way, nevertheless, the above mentioned difference can be retrieved by supposing that while the 'terrestrial' wheel is a plane, the 'celestial' wheel, like the dome, has the form of a segment of a sphere.[3] At first glance this consideration may seem strange but in fact there exists a symbolical object which unites in itself the structure of the wheel and that of the dome. This object, the 'celestial' significance of which is beyond the slightest doubt, is the parasol (*chhatra*). Its ribs are manifestly similar to the spokes of the wheel; and just as the spokes meet together in the hub, so also the ribs are united in a central piece (*karnika*) which supports them and which is described as a 'perforated globe'. The axis, that is, the handle of the parasol, passes through this central piece just as the axle of the chariot penetrates the hub of the wheel; and the prolongation of this axis beyond the point of junction with the ribs or radii corresponds, moreover, to the axis of a *stupa* in the case where the *stupa* is raised in the form of a mast above the summit of the dome. Furthermore, it is obvious that the parasol itself, in virtue of its destined function, is nothing other than the 'portable' equivalent of a vaulted roof.[4]

It is by reason of its celestial symbolism that the parasol is one of the insignia of royalty. Strictly speaking, it is even an emblem of the *Chakravartī* or universal monarch[5] and, if it is attributed to ordinary sovereigns, it is only insofar as they represent him to a certain extent, each within his own domain, participating thus in his nature and being identified with him in his cosmic function.[6] It is important now to mention that by a strict application of the inverse sense of analogy, the parasol, in its ordinary use in 'this world below', is a protection against the light, while insofar as it represents Heaven its ribs on the contrary are the rays of light themselves; and of course it is in this higher sense that it must be seen when it is an attribute of royalty. A similar remark also applied to the *ushnīsha*, understood in its primitive sense

3. This difference of form is that which exists between the two shells of the turtle, the equivalent symbolism of which we have just indicated above [see note 5 of the previous chapter].

4. [Until Vatican Council II the umbrella was used in certain formal Eucharistic rituals in the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church. Tr.]

5. We will recall that the very designation of *Chakravartī* is also related to the symbolism of the wheel.

6. We have previously alluded to the cosmic function recognised in the Emperor by the Far Eastern tradition. It goes without saying that it is the same kind of thing that is in question here; and in connection with what we have just said about the meaning of the parasol we will also remark that in China the accomplishment of rites constituting the 'cult of Heaven' was exclusively the prerogative of the Emperor [cf., *The Great Triad*, ch. 17].

as a headress; this commonly has the role of protecting against the heat, but, when it is symbolically attributed to the sun, it inversely represents that which radiates the heat (and this double sense is contained in the very etymology of the word *ushnīsha*). Let us add that it is according to its solar symbolism that the *ushnisha*, which is strictly a turban and which can also be a crown (which, moreover, amounts basically to the same thing)[7] is also, like the parasol, an insignia of royalty; both are thus associated with the character of 'glory' inherent therein, instead of answering to a mere practical need as is the case with the ordinary man.

On the other hand, while the *ushnisha* envelops the head, the parasol is identified with the head itself. In fact, in its microcosmic correspondence, it represents the skull and hair; and in this connection it is to be noted that in the symbolism of different traditions, hair most often represents rays of light. In ancient Buddhist iconography, the combination of the footprints, the altar or the throne,[8] and the parasol, corresponding respectively to Earth, the intermediary space, and Heaven, represents in a complete way the cosmic body of the *Mahāpurusha* or 'Universal Man'.[9] Likewise the dome, in cases such as that of the *stupa*, is also in certain respects[10] a representation of the human skull, and this observation is particularly important by reason of the fact that the opening through which the axis passes, whether it be the dome or the parasol that is in question, corresponds in the human being to the *brahma-randhra*; but we shall have to return later to this last point in more detail.

7. In the Islamic tradition, the turban, considered more especially as the distinctive mark of a *shaikh* (in either the exoteric or esoteric order) is currently designated as *tāj al-Islām*. It is, therefore, a crown which, in this case, is the sign not of temporal power, such as that of kings, but of a spiritual authority. Let us recall also the connection between the crown and the solar rays, and the close relationship that exists between this symbolism and that of horns, of which we have already spoken [see ch. 30 above].

8. The throne, as seat, is in a sense the equivalent of the altar, this being the seat of *Agni*. The cosmic chariot is also driven by *Agni*, or by the Sun which then has the 'box' [of the chariot] for seat. As for the relationship of the World Axis with the *antariksha*, it can be again be noted that when the altar or hearth is placed beneath the central opening of the vault of an edifice, the 'column of smoke' of *Agni* which rises and issues forth by this opening represents the World Axis.

9. In this connection, we can also refer to the description of the 'macrocosmic' body of *Vaishvānara*, in which the luminous celestial spheres, taken as one whole, are assimilated to the upper part of the head, that is, to the cranial vault (see *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 12).

10. Coomaraswamy has drawn our attention to the fact that the same remark applies to the prehistoric *tumulus*, the form of which often seems to have intentionally imitated that of the cranium; moreover, as the *tumulus* or mound is an artificial image of the mountain, the same meaning must also be attached to its symbolism. In this respect, it is not without interest to note that the name *Golgotha* means precisely 'skull', just as does the word *Calvarium* by which it is translated in Latin. According to a legend current during the Middle Ages but whose origin may go back much further, this designation would refer to the skull of Adam who, according to the legend, was buried in that place (or who, in a more esoteric sense, would be identified with the mountain itself); and this leads us again to the consideration of Universal Man; it is his skull which is represented at the foot of the cross—the cross which is yet another representation of the World Axis.

43 § The Narrow Gate

In his study of the symbolism of the dome, Coomaraswamy has called attention to a point that is particularly worthy of attention as regard the traditional representation of the solar rays in their relation to the World Axis. In the Vedic tradition, the sun is always at the centre of the Universe and not at its highest point, even though from any particular point it nevertheless should appear as being at the 'summit of the tree';[1] and that is easy to understand if the Universe is symbolised by the wheel, with the sun at its centre and every state of being on its circumference.[2] From any given point whatsoever on this circumference, the World Axis is simultaneously a radius of the circle and a ray of the sun; and it passes geometrically through the sun, to be extended beyond the centre and to complete the diameter. But that is not all: there is also a 'solar ray', the extension of which is not susceptible of any geometrical representation. Here it is a question of the formula according to which the sun is described as having seven rays; of these, six, opposed two by two, form the *trivid vajra*, that is, the three dimensional cross,[3] the rays which correspond to Zenith and Nadir coinciding with our World Axis (*skambha*), while those which correspond to North and South, to East and West, determine the extension of a 'world' (*loka*) represented by a horizontal plane. As for the 'seventh ray', which passes through the sun, though in a sense other than that just mentioned, to lead to the supra-solar worlds (considered as the domain of immortality), it really corresponds to the centre and, consequently, it cannot be represented except by the point of intersection of the branches of the three dimensional cross.[4] Thus its extension beyond the sun cannot be represented in any way, and this corresponds precisely to the 'incommunicable' and 'inexpressible' nature of what is in question. From our point of view, and from that of being situated on the 'circumference' of the Universe, this ray terminates in the sun itself and in a certain way is identified with it as centre, for no one can see through the solar disc by any physical or psychic means whatsoever, and this passage 'beyond the sun' (which is the 'last death' and the passage into true 'immortality') is impossible except in the purely spiritual order.

Now in order to link these last considerations with what we have said already, it must be born in mind that it is by this 'seventh ray' that the heart of every particular being is directly joined to the sun. It is therefore the seventh ray that is pre-eminently the 'solar ray', the *sushumnā* by which

1. On other occasions we have pointed out the representation of the sun, in different traditions, as the fruit of the 'Tree of Life'.

2. This central and thus invariable position of the Sun gives it here the status of a veritable 'pole', while placing it always at the zenith in relation to every point of the Universe.

3. [Still used in the Christian East. Tr.]

4. It is worth remarking that in the symbolic representations of the seven-rayed sun, on ancient Indian coins for example, even though all the rays are necessarily drawn in a circular arrangement around the central disc, the 'seventh' ray is distiguished from the others by a distinctly different shape.

this connection is constantly and invariably established,[5] and it is this also which is the *sūtrātmā*, linking all the states of the being to one another and its total centre.[6] For him who has returned to the centre of his own being, this seventh ray thus necessarily coincides with the World Axis, and it is for such a being that it is said that 'the Sun rises always at the Zenith and sets at the Nadir'.[7] Thus, even though the World Axis may not be this 'seventh ray' for just any being whatsoever, situated at such and such a particular point on the circumference, nevertheless it is always virtually so in the sense that the being has the possibility of identifying himself with the 'seventh ray' by returning to the centre, in whatever state of existence this return may be effected. It could be added that this 'seventh ray' is the only truly immutable 'Axis', the only one that from a universal point of view could be truly designated by this name, and that every particular axis, relative to a contingent situation, is really only an 'axis' in virtue of this possibility of identification with it; and it is ultimately this which gives all its meaning to any symbolically 'localised' representation of the World Axis, such as the one we mentioned in connection with the structure of edifices built according to traditional rules, and especially of those built with a dome-shaped roof; and it is precisely to this subject of the dome that we must now return.

Whether the axis may be represented materially under the form of a tree or of a central pillar, or whether it be represented by the ascending flame and 'column of smoke' of *Agni* in the case where the centre of the edifice is occupied by an altar or hearth,[8] it always terminates exactly at the summit of the dome; and sometimes, as we have pointed out, it even traverses the dome and is extended beyond it in the form of a mast or, in another example, as the shaft of a parasol, the symbolism of which is the same. It is clear that in this context the summit of the dome is to be identified with the nave of the celestial wheel of the 'cosmic chariot'; and since we have seen that the centre of this wheel is occupied by the sun, it follows that the passing of the axis through this point represents that passage 'beyond the Sun', and through it, which was mentioned above. The same is true when, in the absence of any material representation of the axis, the dome is pierced at its summit by a circular opening (through which, in the case just mentioned, the smoke escapes from the hearth directly beneath). This opening is a representation of the solar disc itself as 'Eye of the World', and it is through it that the exit from

5. See *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 20.

6. In the Islamic tradition, one of the meanings of the word *as-sirr*, literally, 'the secret', tallies with this. *As-sirr* is used to designate what is most central in every being and, at the same time, its direct relation with the supreme Centre, by reason of the above mentioned 'incommunicability' of the superlatives in question.

7. *Chāndogya Upanishad* 3: 4. 10.

8. In the case (which we have already noted) of a habitation arranged around an inner court open to the sky (and receiving light only from within), the centre of this court sometimes has in it a fountain which then represents the 'Fountain of Life' that issues from the foot of the 'Tree in the Midst', (although in the nature of things the tree may not have here any material figuration).

the cosmos is accomplished, as we have explained in the studies devoted to the symbolism of the cave.[9] In any case, it is by this central opening and by it alone that the being can pass to the *Brahmaloka*, which is an essentially 'extra-cosmic' domain;[10] and this is also the 'strait gate' which, according to the symbolism of the Gospel, gives access likewise to the 'Kingdom of God'.[11]

The microcosmic correspondence of this 'solar gateway' is easy to find, especially if we refer to the dome's already mentioned likeness to the human skull. The summit of the dome is the 'crown' of the head, that is, the terminal point of the subtle 'coronal artery' or *sushumnā*, which lies in the direct prolongation of the 'solar ray', also called *sushumnā*, and which is in reality even no more than what might be called, at least virtually, its 'intra-human' axial portion. This point of termination is the orifice called *brahma-randhra*, by which the spirit of the being on the way to liberation escapes, once the bonds that united it (as *jīvātmā*) to the psycho-physical composite have been broken;[12] and it goes without saying that this Way is exclusively reserved for the case of the 'knower' (*vidvān*), for whom the axis is effectively identified with the seventh ray, and who is then ready to go forth from the cosmos definitively, passing 'beyond the Sun'.

44 § The Octagon

We return now to the question of the symbolism, shared by most traditions, of structures consisting of a square base section surmounted by a more or less strictly hemispherical dome or cupola. Given that square or cubic forms refer to the earth, and circular or spherical forms to the heavens, the meaning of these two sections is immediately obvious. We will add that earth and

9. Among the North American Indians, who seem to have preserved more unequivocally recognisable traditional data than is commonly believed, the different 'worlds' are often represented as a series of super-imposed caves, and it is by climbing up a central tree that beings pass from one cave to another. Naturally, our world is itself one of these caves, having the sky for vault.

10. On this subject, one can refer to the descriptions of the *deva-yāna* of which the *Brahma-loka* is the term 'beyond the sun' (see *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 21.

11. In the symbolism of archery, the centre of the target likewise has the same significance; without dwelling on this subject here, we will only recall that the arrow is yet another axial symbol and also one of the most frequent figurations of the 'solar ray'. In certain cases a thread, attached to the arrow, is shot through the target; this strikingly recalls the Gospel image of the 'eye of the needle', and the symbol of the thread (*sūtra*) is moreover to be found also in the term *sūtrātma*. [On the 'Symbolism of Archery', see Coomaraswarmy, *What is Civilisation?* Golgonooza Press, 1989, ch. 16].

12. The rite of posthumous trepanation is related to this in a very clear way, and the existence of this rite has been established from many prehistoric sepulchres; and it was even preserved up to much more recent times among certain peoples. Moreover, in the Christian tradition, the tonsure of priests, of which the form is also that of the solar disc and of the 'eye' of the dome, manifestly refers to the same ritual symbolism.

heaven do not designate solely the poles between which all manifestation is produced, as they do for example in the Great Triad of the Far Eastern tradition, but they also comprise, as in the Hindu *Tribhuvana*, those aspects of this manifestation itself which are closest, respectively, to these two poles, and which, for that reason, are called the terrestrial world and the celestial world. There is a point here which we have not had occasion to dwell upon previously, but which deserves to be considered none the less: insofar as the edifice represents the realisation of a 'cosmic model', its structure, if reduced exclusively to these two parts, would be incomplete in the sense that, in the superposition of the 'three worlds', an element corresponding to the 'intermediary world' would be lacking. In fact, this element also exists, for the dome or the circular vault cannot rest directly on the square base; and to make for the passage from the one to the other, a transitional form somehow intermediary between square and circle is needed, a form that is generally that of the octagon.

This octagonal form is, indeed, from the geometrical point of view, really closer to the circle than to the square, for the more sides a regular polygon has, the nearer it comes to the circle. In fact, one knows that the circle can be considered as the limit towards which a regular polygon tends, as the number of its sides increases indefinitely; and this gives us a clear idea of the nature of the limit, understood in the mathematical sense: it is not the last term of the series tending towards it, but it is outside and beyond this series, for however great the number of the sides of a polygon, it can never reach the point of being confused with the circle, the definition of which is essentially different from that of polygons.[1] On the other hand, it may be noted that in the series of polygons obtained by setting out from the square and by doubling each time the number of the sides, the octagon is the first term;[2] it is thus the simplest of all these polygons, and at the same time it may be considered as representative of the entire series of intermediaries.

From the viewpoint of cosmic symbolism, particularly in its spatial aspect, the quaternary form, that is, the square when it is a question of polygons, is naturally related to the four cardinal points and their various traditional correspondences. In order to obtain the octagonal form it is necessary to add the four intermediary points[3] between the four cardinal points, making altogether a totality of eight directions, which are those of the 'eight winds'[4] as various traditions designate them. This consideration of the

1. Cf., *Les Principes du calcul infinitésimal*, ch. 12 and 13.

2. Or the second, if the square itself be counted as first term; but speaking of the intermediaries between the square and the circle, as we do here, it is indeed the octagon that is the first term.

3. When the cardinal points are placed in correspondence with the corporeal elements, the intermediary points correspond to the sensible qualities: hot and cold, dry and wet.

4. At Athens, the 'Tower of the Winds' was octagonal. Let us note in passing the strangeness of the expression 'wind-rose', which is frequently used without attracting special attention. In Rosicrucian symbolism, *Rosa Mundi* and *Rota Mundi* were equivalent expressions, and the *Rosa Mundi* was represented precisely with eight rays corresponding to the elements and to the sensible qualities.

'winds' brings us to a point that is very worthy of note: in the Vedic ternary of deities presiding respectively over the worlds, *Agni*, *Vāyu* and *Āditya*, it is in fact *Vāyu* who corresponds to the intermediary world. In this connection, as regards the two parts of the building, representing respectively the terrestrial and celestial worlds, it should be mentioned that the hearth or altar, which normally occupies the centre of the base, evidently corresponds to *Agni*, and that the 'eye' at the summit of the dome represents the 'solar gateway', and thus corresponds no less rigorously to *Āditya*. Let us add that *Vāyu*, insofar as he is identified with the 'vital breath', has obviously a direct relationship with the psychic domain or subtle manifestation, which completely justifies this correspondence, whether it be considered macrocosmically or microcosmically.

In construction, the octagonal form can obviously be achieved in different ways, as for example by eight pillars supporting the vault. We find an example of this in China in the case of the *Ming-tang*,[5] of which 'the round roof is supported by eight columns that rest on a base square like the earth; for in order to achieve this squaring of the circle, which goes from the celestial unity of the vault to the square of the earthly elements, it is necessary to pass through the octagon which relates to the intermediary world of the eight directions, the eight gates, and the eight winds'.[6] The symbolism of the 'eight gates' which is also mentioned here, is explained by the fact that the door is essentially a place of passage, representing as such the passage from one state to another, and more especially from an 'outer' to an 'inner' state, at least relatively; moreover this relationship of the outward and the inward, at whatever level it be situated, is always comparable to that of the terrestrial and the celestial worlds.

In Christianity, the ancient baptistries were octagonal in form; and despite the forgetting or neglect of symbolism from the time of the Renaissance, this form is generally still to be found in the basin of baptismal fonts.[7] Here again, it is obviously a place of transition or of passage that is in question. Moreover, in the first centuries, the baptistry was situated outside the church and only those who had received baptism were allowed to penetrate into the interior. It goes without saying that the fact that subsequently the fonts were moved into the church itself, but always kept near the entrance, changes nothing as regards their signification. In a sense—and this goes with what we have just been saying—the church's relationship with what lies outside it is like an image of the relationship between the celestial and the terrestrial worlds, and the baptistry, through which it is necessary to pass in order to go from the one to the other, corresponds by that very fact to the intermediary world; but apart from this, the baptistry is in a still more direct relationship with that world owing to the scope of the rite which is accomplished within it, and which is precisely the means of a

5. See *The Great Triad*, ch. 16.
6. Luc Benoist, *Art du Monde*, p. 90.
7. Cf., *ibid*, p. 65.

regeneration effected in the psychic domain, that is, in those elements of the being which by their nature pertain to the intermediary world.[8]

As regards the eight directions, we have drawn attention to a concordance between different traditional forms which, though it relates to something other than what we had more especially in mind here, nevertheless seems to us too worthy of note not to be cited. Luc Benoist mentions[9] that 'in the *Scivias* of St Hildegard, the divine throne which encompasses the worlds is represented by a circle supported by eight angels'. Now this 'throne which encompasses the worlds' is as exact a translation as possible of the Arabic expression *al-ʿArsh al-Muḥīṭ*, and an identical representation is found in the Islamic tradition, where it is also supported by eight angels who, as we have explained elsewhere,[10] correspond both to the eight directions and to groups of letters of the Arabic alphabet. It must be admitted that such a 'coincidence' is rather surprising! It is no longer the intermediary world that is in question here, unless it can be said that the function of these angels is to establish a connection between the intermediary and celestial worlds. However that may be, this symbolism can nevertheless be linked, at least in a certain respect, with what has been said above, if we recall the Biblical text according to which God 'Maketh the winds his messengers',[11] not forgetting that the angels are literally the divine 'messengers'.

45 § The Cornerstone

THE symbolism of the cornerstone in the Christian tradition is based on this text: 'The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner', or more exactly, 'the head of the angle' (*caput anguli*).[1] What is strange is that this symbolism is usually misunderstood, due to a common confusion between the 'cornerstone' and the 'foundation stone', referred to in the even better known text: 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it'.[2] This confusion is strange, we say, because

8. When consecrating the water, the priest traces on its surface, with his breath, a sign having the form of the Greek letter *psi* [ψ], the first letter of the word *psuché*—a very significant consideration in this respect, as it is in fact in the psychic order that the influence vehicled by the consecrated water has to operate.

9. Op. cit., p. 79.

10. 'Note sur l'angélologie de l'alphabet arabe', *Etudes Traditionelles*, August-September, 1938 [republished in a posthumous collection of the author's essays, *Aperçus sur l'ésoterisme islamique et le Taoïsme*, Paris, 1973. Tr.].

11. Psalm 104: 4 [Revised Authorized Version. Cf., the *Qur'ān* also: God 'sendeth the winds as good tidings heralding His mercy'. 7: 57; also 25: 48 and 26: 63. Tr.]

1. Psalm 118 (117): 22; Matthew 21: 42; Mark 22: 10; Luke 20: 17.

2. Matthew 16: 18.

from the specifically Christian point of view, it amounts to confusing St Peter with Christ himself; for it is Christ who is expressly designated as the 'cornerstone', as is shown by the following passage from St Paul, who, moreover, clearly distinguishes it from the 'foundations' of the building: 'Ye are . . . built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the supreme cornerstone (*summo angulari lapide*), in whom all the building fitly framed together is growing unto a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are being built together (*coedificamini*) for a habitation of God in the Spirit'.[3] If the misunderstanding in question were solely modern, it would not have been particularly surprising, but it seems that it is in fact to be found already in times when it is hardly possible to attribute it purely and simply to the ignorance of symbolism. One is thus led to wonder if in reality it was not rather a question in the beginning of an intentional 'substitution', this being explicable by the role of St Peter as 'substitute' for Christ (in Latin, *vicarius* corresponding in this sense to the Arabic *khalīfah*). If it was so, this way of 'veiling' the symbolism of the 'cornerstone' would seem to indicate that it was held to contain something particularly mysterious, and it will be seen in what follows that such a supposition is far from being unjustified.[4] Be that as it may, even from the point of view of simple logic, this identification of the two stones confronts us with an impossibility which becomes altogether obvious once we examine the above quoted texts with a little attention: the 'foundation stone' is the one which is positioned first, at the very outset of the construction of a building (and this is why it is also called the 'first stone');[5] how then could it be rejected in the course of this very same construction? For that to be so it is necessary, on the contrary, that the 'cornerstone' be such that it cannot as yet find its place; and in fact, as we will see, it cannot find it except at the moment of the completion of the entire edifice, and it is thus that it really becomes the 'head of the angle'.

In an article to which we have already called attention,[6] Coomaraswamy remarks that the purpose of the text of St Paul is obviously to depict Christ as the unique principle on which the entire structure of the Church depends,

3. Ephesians 2: 19–22.

4. The 'substitution' may also have been prompted by the phonetic similarity between the Hebrew name *Kephas*, meaning 'stone', and the Greek word *Kephalē*, 'head'. But there is no other link between these two words, and the foundation of a building obviously cannot be identified with its 'head', that is, its summit, which would amount to inverting the whole structure. It might also be wondered whether this 'reversal' does not have some symbolic correspondence with the crucifixion of St Peter head downwards.

5. This stone must be placed at the Northeast angle of the building; but it is to be noted in this connection that in the symbolism of St Peter several aspects or functions, corresponding to different 'situations', are to be distinguished, for on the other hand, as *janitor*, his place is to the West where the entrance to the normally oriented church is to be found. Moreover, St Peter and St Paul are also represented as the two 'columns' of the Church, and then they are usually represented, one with the two keys and the other with the sword, in the attitude of two *dwārapālas*.

6. 'Eckstein', in the review *Speculum*, January 1939 [reviewed by Guénon in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, May 1939].

and he adds that 'the principle of a thing is neither one of its parts among others nor the totality of its parts, but that to which all the parts are brought back into a unity without composition'. The 'foundation stone' can, in a certain sense, be called a 'cornerstone' as it usually is, for it is placed at an angle or at a corner of the edifice;[7] but it is not unique as such, the edifice necessarily having four angles; and even if one wishes to speak more particularly of the 'first stone', it in no way differs from the foundation stones of the other angles except by its situation,[8] and it is not distinguished from them either by its form or its function, being just one of four supports all equal to each other. It could be said that any one of the four 'cornerstones' 'reflects' in a sense the dominant principle of the edifice, but it could in no way be considered as being the principle itself.[9] Moreover, if this were really all there is to it, we could not even speak logically of '*the* cornerstone', as in fact there would be four of them. Thus the cornerstone must be something essentially different from a 'cornerstone' understood in the current sense of 'foundation stone', and all they have in common is that they both pertain to the same symbolism of construction.

We have just alluded to the shape of the cornerstone, and in fact there is a particularly important point here: it is because this stone has a special shape which sets it apart from all the others that not only can it not find its place in the course of the construction, but even the builders cannot understand its purpose. If they could, it is obvious that they would not reject it and that they would be content to set it aside until the end. But they ask themselves, 'what they are to do with the stone', and not being able to give a satisfactory answer to this question, they decide to 'heave it over among the rubbish',[10] believing it to be unusable. The purpose of this stone cannot be understood except by another category of builders, who have not yet come upon the scene. These are they who have passed 'from the try-square to the compass'; and by this distinction we must naturally understand that of the geometric forms which these two instruments respectively serve to trace, namely, the square and the circle which are known to symbolise in a general way earth and heaven. The square form corresponds here to the lower part of the building, and the circular form to the upper part which, in this case, must consist either of a dome or a vault.[11] In fact, the 'cornerstone' is in reality a

7. In this study we shall often have to refer to English 'technical' terms which belong to the language of ancient operative Masonry, and which have been preserved for the most part in the rituals of *Royal Arch Masonry* and the accessory grades attached to it, rituals for which there exist no equivalents in French.

8. According to the operative ritual, the 'first stone' is, as we have said, that of the Northeast angle. The stones of the other angles are then placed successively according to the apparent course of the sun, that is, in this order: Southeast, Southwest, Northwest.

9. Obviously this 'reflection' is directly related to the substitution of which we spoke.

10. This Masonic phrase (see note 7) contains the two ideas of raising up and rejecting. [The crucifixion combines them. Tr.]

11. This distinction, in other words, is that of *Square Masonry* from *Arch Masonry* which by their respective relationships with 'earth' and 'heaven' are here placed in correspondence with the Lesser Mysteries and the Greater Mysteries.

'keystone' (*clef de voûte*). Coomaraswamy says that in order to give the true meaning of the expression 'is become the head of the corner', it could be translated as 'is become the keystone of the arch', which is exactly right; and thus this stone, by its shape as well as by its position, is really unique in the entire edifice, as it must be to symbolise the principle on which all depends. It may seem surprising that this representation of the principle should thus be put into place only as the final act of construction; but it can be said that the building process, in its entirety, is ordered in relation to this keystone (which St Paul expresses in saying 'in whom all the building fitly framed together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord'), and that it is in the keystone that the building finds at last its unity. We have here yet another application of the analogy which we have already explained on previous occasions between the 'first' and the 'last' or the 'principle' and the 'end': the construction represents manifestation, in which the principle does not appear except as the final accomplishment; and it is precisely in virtue of the same analogy that the 'first stone' or the 'foundation stone' can be regarded as a reflection of the 'last stone' which is the true 'cornerstone'.

The ambiguity implied in an expression such as 'cornerstone' stems from the different possible meanings of the word 'angle'. Coomaraswamy remarks that in various languages the words meaning 'angle' are often related to others meaning 'head' and 'extremity': in Greek, *kephalê*, 'head', and in architecture, 'capital' (*capitulum*, diminutive of *caput*) can only apply to a summit. But *akros* (Sanskrit, *agra*) may indicate an extremity in any direction, that is, in the case of a building, the summit or one of the four 'corners' (this last word is etymologically akin to the Greek *gonia*, 'angle'), though often it is also applied by preference to the summit. But even more important from the special point of view of the texts concerning the 'cornerstone' in the Judeo-Christian tradition is the Hebrew word for 'angle'. This word is *pinnah* and one finds the expression *eben pinnah*, 'angle stone'; and *rosh pinnah*, 'head of the angle'. But what is especially to be noted is that in a figurative sense, this same word *pinnah* is used to signify 'chief': an expression designating the 'chiefs of the people' (*pinnah ha-am*) is translated literally in the *Vulgate* by *angulos populorum*.[12] A 'chief' is etymologically a 'head' (*caput*); and *pinnah* is, by its root, linked to *pne*, which means 'face'. The close relation between the ideas of 'head' and of 'face' is evident and, moreover, the term 'face' pertains to a very widespread symbolism which deserves a separate examination.[13] Yet another related idea is that of 'point' (which is found in the Sanskrit *agra*, the Greek *akros*, the Latin *acer* and *acies*); we have already spoken of the symbolism of points in connection with the symbolism of weapons and horns,[14] and we

12. I Samuel 14: 38; the Greek of the Septuagint likewise uses the word *gonia* here.

13. Cf., A. M. Hocart, *Les Castes*, pp. 151–54, the expression 'faces of the earth' used in Fiji to designate the chiefs. The Greek word *karai*, in the first centuries of Christianity, served to designate the five 'faces' or 'heads of the Church', that is, the five chief patriarcates, of which the initial letters form this word: Constantinople, Alexandria, Rome, Antioch, Jerusalem [Ierusalem].

14. It may be noted that the English word corner is obviously derived from the Latin *cornu*, horn.

have seen that it is linked to the idea of extremity, but more particularly as concerning the upper extremity, that is, the highest point or the summit. Thus all these parallels only confirm what we have said about the position of the 'cornerstone' at the summit of the edifice. Even if there are other 'cornerstones' in the more general sense of the expression,[15] it is indeed only this which is really '*the* cornerstone' *par excellence*.

We find other interesting information in the meanings of the Arabic word *rukn*, 'angle' or 'corner'. This word, because it designates the extremities of a thing, that is, its most remote and hence most hidden parts (*recondita* and *abscondita* as one might say in Latin), sometimes takes a sense of 'secret' or of 'mystery'; and in this respect, its plural, *arkān*, is comparable to the Latin *arcanum* which likewise has this same sense, and which it strikingly resembles; moreover, in the language of the Hermetists at least, the use of the term 'arcane' was certainly influenced directly by the Arabic word in question.[16] Furthermore, *rukn* also has the meaning of 'base' or 'foundation', which leads us back to the 'cornerstone' understood as foundation stone. In alchemical terminology, *al-arkān*, when used without any other specification, are the four elements, that is, the substantial 'bases' of our world, which are thus assimilated to the foundation stones of the four angles of a building, since it is on them in a way that the whole corporeal world (likewise represented by the square) is constructed;[17] and this brings us back directly to the very symbolism which is now our particular theme. In fact, there are not only these four *arkān* or 'basic' elements, but there is also a fifth *rukn*, the fifth element or the 'quintessence' (that is, ether, *al-athīr*). This fifth element is not on the same 'plane' as the others, for it is not simply a basis as they are, but rather the very principle of this world.[18] It will be represented, therefore, as the fifth 'angle' of the edifice, which is its summit; and to this 'fifth', which is in reality its 'first', the designation of supreme angle rightly belongs, the angle *par excellence* or 'angle of angles' (*rukn al-arkān*), because the multiplicity of the other angles is reduced in it to

15. In this sense there are not only four 'cornerstones' at the base, but there are also others at any level of the construction; and these stones are all of the same ordinary form, rectilinear and rectangular (that is, cut 'on the square', the word 'square' moreover having here the double meaning of 'try-square' and of 'square' in its ordinary sense) in contrast with the unique 'keystone'.

16. It might be interesting to investigate whether there may be a genuine etymological kinship between the two Arabic and Latin words, even in the ancient usage of the latter (for example, the *disciplina arcana* of the earliest Christians), or whether it is only a question of a 'convergence' produced later with the Hermetists of the Middle Ages.

17. This assimilation of the four elements to the four angles of a square is naturally also related to the correspondence that exists between these same elements and the cardinal points.

18. It would be on the same plane (in its central point) if this plane was taken as representing an entire state of existence; but this is not the case here, as it is the whole of the edifice that is an image of the world. Let it be noted in this connection that the horizontal projection of the pyramid, of which we speak a little further on, consists of the square base with its diagonals, along which the lateral edges are projected, with the summit at their meeting point, that is, at the very centre of the square.

unity.[19] It may be noted further that the geometric figure obtained by joining these five angles is that of the pyramid with a quadrangular base: the lateral edges of the pyramid emanate from its summit like so many rays, just as the four ordinary elements, which are represented by the lower extremities of these edges, proceed from the fifth and are produced by it; and it is also following in the direction of these same edges, which we have intentionally compared to rays for this reason (and also in virtue of the 'solar' nature of the point they issue from, according to what we have said about the 'eye' of the dome), that the 'cornerstone' of the summit is reflected in each of the 'foundation stones' of the four angles of the base. Finally, in what has just been said there is the very clear indication of a correlation existing between alchemical symbolism and architectural symbolism, which, moreover, is to be explained by their common cosmological character; and this is yet another important point to which we shall have to return in connection with other parallels of the same order.

The 'cornerstone', taken in its true sense of 'summit stone', is designated, in English, both as 'keystone' and as 'capstone' (the last term is sometimes found also written as 'capestone'), and as 'copestone' (or 'coping stone'). The first of these three words is easy to understand, for it is the exact equivalent of the French term *clef de voûte* (or *clef d'arc*, the word 'keystone' being applicable to the stone that forms the summit of an arch as well as that of a vault); but the two others demand a little more explanation. In 'capstone', the word cap is obviously the Latin *caput*, 'head', which brings us back to the designation of this stone as the 'head of the angle'; this is the stone which 'achieves' or 'crowns' an edifice; and it is also a capital, which is in the same way the 'crowning' of a column.[20] We have just spoken of 'achievement', and the two words 'cap' and 'chief' are, in fact, etymologically identical;[21] the

19. In the sense of 'mystery' that we indicated above, *rukn al-arkān* is the equivalent of *sirr al-asrār*, which is represented, as we have explained elsewhere, by the upper point of the letter *alif*, the *alif* itself representing the World Axis; this corresponds exactly to the position of the 'keystone', as we shall see yet more clearly later.

20. The term 'crowning' here is to be compared to the designation of the 'crown' of the head by reason of the symbolic assimilation that we noted previously of the 'eye of the dome' with the *Brahmarandhra*. Further, it is a fact that the crown, like horns, expresses the idea of elevation. It is to be noted also in this connection that the oath of the Royal Arch grade contains an allusion to 'the crown of the skull', which suggests a parallel between the opening of the cranium (as in the posthumous rites of trepanation) and the 'removing' of the 'keystone'. For the rest, the so-called 'penalties' expressed in the oaths of the different masonic grades, as well as the signs that correspond to them, relate in reality to the several subtle centres of the human being.

21. In the meaning of the word 'achieve' or of the somewhat equivalent expression 'bring to a head' the idea of 'head' is associated with that of 'end', which corresponds to the 'cornerstone', both as 'summit stone' and as 'last stone' of the edifice. We will mention yet another term derived from *chef*: the *chevet* [also in English as a loan word, with precisely the same meaning. Tr.] of a church is its 'head', that is, the eastern extremity where the apse is located, the semi-circular shape of which corresponds, in the horizontal plane, to the dome or cupola in a vertical elevation, as we have explained on another occasion.

'capstone' is, therefore, the 'head' or 'chief' of the edifice or of the work, and by reason of its special shape, which requires particular knowledge or abilities for its cutting, it is also and at the same time a *chef d'œuvre* in the guild sense of this expression.[22] It is by the 'capstone' that the edifice is completely finished, or in other words, that it is finally brought to its 'perfection'.[23]

As for the word 'copestone', the word 'cope' expresses the idea of 'to cover'. This is to be explained by the fact, not only that the upper part of the edifice is its 'cover', but also—and we would even say especially—that this stone is placed in such a way as to cover the opening of the summit, that is, the 'eye' of the dome or vault, of which we have already spoken.[24] It is thus, in this respect, the equivalent of a 'roof plate', as Coomaraswamy remarks; and he adds that this stone may be considered as the upper end or capital of the 'axial pillar' (Sanskrit *skambha*, Greek *stauros*).[25] That pillar, as we have already explained, does not have to be materially represented in the structure, but it is none the less its essential part, around which the whole is co-ordinated. The 'summit' nature of the 'axial pillar', no more than 'ideally' present, is indicated in a particularly striking way in those cases where the 'key of the vault' is prolonged in the form of a pendentive down into the inside of the building, without being visibly supported by anything at its lower end.[26] The entire construction has its principle in this pillar, and all its diverse parts are finally unified in its pinnacle which is the summit of this same pillar and which is the 'key of the vault' or the 'head of the angle'.[27]

The real interpretation of the 'cornerstone' as being the 'summit stone'

22. The word 'work' (*œuvre*) is used both in architecture and in alchemy, and it will be seen that it is with reason that we make this comparison: in architecture, the fulfilment of the work is the 'cornerstone'; in alchemy, it is the 'philosophers' stone'.

23. In certain Masonic rites the grades which correspond more or less exactly to this upper part of the structure (we say more or less exactly, for there is sometimes a certain confusion in that domain) are designated precisely by the name 'grades of perfection'. On the other hand, the word 'exaltation', which designated accession to the grade of Royal Arch, may be understood as alluding to the elevated position of the 'keystone'.

24. 'To bring forth the copestone' is the 'technical' Masonic phrase that we have found used in connection with the placing of this stone. As it has been buried 'among the rubbish', it is a question of extricating it and therefore of bringing it back to light in order to place it prominently at the summit of the building, so that it becomes the 'head of the angle'; and thus, 'to bring forth' is the opposite of 'to heave over'.

25. *Stauros* also means 'cross', and in Christianity the cross is assimilated to the World Axis. Coomaraswamy compares this word with the Sanskrit *sthavara*, 'firm' or 'stable', which is in fact a most fitting epithet for a pillar and which, moreover, is in exact agreement with the meaning of 'stability' given to the joining of two columns of the Temple of Solomon [cf., I Kings 7: 15–22. Tr.]

26. As we have said, it is the summit of the 'axial pillar' which corresponds to the upper point of the *alif* in the symbolism of Arabic letters. As regards the terms 'keystone' and *clef de voûte*, we recall also that the key itself has, as symbol, an 'axial' significance.

27. Coomaraswamy recalls the symbolic identity of the roof (and more particularly so when it is in the form of a vault) with the parasol. We will add also that the Chinese symbol of the 'Great Extreme' (*Tai-ki*) literally designates an 'achievement' or a 'summit'; it is in fact the summit of the 'roof of the world'.

seems in fact to have been quite generally known in the Middle Ages, as is clear from an illustration (*figure* 15)[28] in the *Speculum Humanæ Salvationis*. This work was widely disseminated, for several hundred manuscripts of it are still extant. Two masons are to be seen here, each holding a trowel in

Figure 15

one hand, and supporting by the other hand the stone which they are about to place at the summit of the edifice (apparently a church tower, whose summit this stone is to complete), which leaves no doubt whatsoever as to its meaning. It is to be noted, in connection with this drawing, that the stone in question, as 'key of the vault', or in any other similar function it may have according to the structure of the edifice it is destined to 'crown', cannot, by its very form, be placed in position except from above (failing which, moreover, it might well fall down inside the building). As such it may be said to represent the 'stone descended from Heaven', an expression which applies perfectly to Christ[29] and which also recalls the stone of the Grail (the *lapsit exillis* of

28. *Manuscript of Munich*, col. 146, folio 35 (Lutz and Perdrizet, II, plate 64). A photograph of this was sent to us by Coomaraswamy, and it was published in the *Art Bulletin*, XVII, p. 450, *figure* 20, by Erwin Panofsky, who considers this illustration as closest to the prototype and who, in this connection, speaks of *lapis in caput anguli* as of a 'keystone'. It could also be said, following our previous quotation, that this figure represents the 'bringing forth of the copestone'.

29. A parallel could be drawn, in this respect, between the 'stone descended from heaven' and the 'bread descended from heaven', for there are important symbolic relationships between the stone and the bread; but this falls outside the scope of the present study. In any case, the 'descent from heaven' naturally represents the *avatarana*.

Wolfram of Eschenbach, which can be interpreted as *lapis ex cœlis*).[30] There is also another important point to note here: Erwin Panofsky has remarked that this same illustration shows the stone as diamond shaped (which again links it with the Grail stone, since that is always described as being cut into facets). This question deserves closer examination, for although such a representation is far from being the most common, it has to do with aspects of the complex symbolism of the 'cornerstone' other than those we have studied so far and of equal interest for bringing out the connections of this symbolism with traditional symbolism as a whole.

Before going on to this however, there is still a secondary question that needs to be clarified: we have just said that the 'summit stone' may not in every case be the 'key of the vault', and in fact it is only so in domed structures. In every other case, for example, that of a building surmounted by a pointed roof or a roof in the form of a tent, there is none the less a 'last stone' which, placed at the summit, plays the same part as the 'key of the vault' in this respect, and which consequently corresponds to it from a symbolic point of view, but without it being possible to designate it by the same name; and as much must be said of the special case of the 'pyramidion' to which we have alluded on another occasion. It should be clearly understood that in the symbolism of the Medieval builders, which is based on the Judeo-Christian tradition and which is especially linked, as to its prototype, with the construction of the Temple of Solomon,[31] it is an unchanging constant that, as regards the 'cornerstone', it is a 'key of the vault' that is meant; and if the exact form of the Temple of Solomon has given rise to discussions from the historical point of view, it is in any case quite certain that this form was not that of a pyramid. These are facts that must necessarily be taken into account in the interpretation of Biblical texts relating to the 'cornerstone'.[32] The 'pyramidion', that is, the stone forming the upper point of the pyramid, is in no way a 'key of the vault'; but it is, none the less, the 'crown' of the edifice, and it may be noted that it reproduces in miniature the entire form thereof, as if the whole structure was thus synthesized in this one unique stone. The expression 'head of the angle', in the literal sense, fits it quite well, as does also the figurative sense of the Hebrew word for 'angle' as meaning the 'chief', the more so in that the pyramid, starting from the multiplicity of the base and

30. Cf., also the symbolic stone of the *Estoile Internelle* of which Monsieur Charbonneau-Lassy has spoken and which, like the emerald of the Grail, is a faceted stone. This stone, in the cup wherein it is placed, corresponds exactly to the 'jewel in the lotus' (*mani padmē*) of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

31. The legends of the guilds, in all their branches, bear witness to this, no less than those 'remains' of the old operative Masonry which we have been considering here.

32. Thus it could in no way be a question here, as some have claimed, of an allusion to an incident that occurred during the construction of the Great Pyramid which supposedly, as a result was never altogether completed—a very dubious hypothesis in itself and an historical question that is probably insoluble. Besides, this very lack of completion would run directly counter to the symbolism according to which the stone that had been rejected finally takes its eminent place as 'head of the angle'.

gradually converging towards the unity of the summit, is often taken as the symbol of a hierarchy. On the other hand, according to what we have explained previously on the subject of the summit and the four angles of the base in connection with the meaning of the Arabic word *rukn*, it could be said that the form of the pyramid is contained implicitly as it were in every architectural structure. The solar symbolism of this form, which we then indicated, is expressed more particularly in the 'pyramidion', as diverse archaeological descriptions cited by Coomaraswamy clearly show. The central point or the summit corresponds to the sun itself, and the four faces (each of which is included between two outermost 'rays' which delimit its domain) correspond to so many secondary aspects of this same sun, in relation with the four cardinal points towards which these faces are respectively turned. Despite all this, it is none the less true that the 'pyramidion' is only a particular case of the 'cornerstone' and that it represents it only in a special traditional form, that of the ancient Egyptians; to correspond to the Judeo-Christian symbolism of this same stone, which pertains to a very different other traditional form, it lacks an essential characteristic, and this missing quality is that of being a 'key of the vault'.

We can now return to the representation of the 'cornerstone' in the form of a diamond. Coomaraswamy, in the article we referred to, begins with a remark made in reference to the German word *Eckstein*, which has precisely the meaning of both 'cornerstone' and 'diamond';[33] and he recalls in this connection the symbolic meanings of the *vajra*, which we have already considered on various occasions.[34] Generally, the stone or the metal which was considered as the hardest and the most brilliant has been taken, in different traditions, as a symbol of 'indestructibility, of invulnerability, of stability, of light, and of immortality'; and these qualities in particular are very often attributed to the diamond. The idea of 'indestructibility' or of 'indivisibility' (both are closely linked, and are expressed in Sanskrit by the same word *akshara*) suits the stone which represents the one principle of the edifice (true unity being indivisible). The idea of 'stability' which, in the architectural realm, is applied to the pillar, is equally apt when the stone is considered as constituting the capital of the 'axial pillar' which, itself, symbolises the world axis; and this axis, which Plato describes as an 'axis of diamond', is also on the other hand a 'pillar of light' (as symbol of *Agni* and as 'solar ray'). All the more applicable, then, 'pre-eminently' one might

33. John Joseph Stoudt, *Consider The Lilies, How They Grow*, in connection with the meaning of an ornamental motif in the form of a diamond, explained by writings in which Christ is spoken of as being the *Eckstein*. The double meaning of this word is plausibly explained, from the etymological point of view, by the fact that it can be understood both as 'angle stone' (cornerstone) and as 'angled stone' (faceted stone). But this explanation, of course, takes away none of the value of the symbolic connection indicated by the junction of these two meanings in one and the same word.

34. [See for example ch. 27. Ed.]

say, is this last quality to the summit of the axis, to its 'crowning', which represents the very source whence, as luminous ray, it emanates.[35] In Hindu and Buddhist symbolism, whatever has a 'central' or 'axial' meaning is generally assimilated to the diamond (for example, in expressions such as *vajrasana*, 'diamond throne'); and it is easy to understand that all these associations form part of a tradition which may be called truly universal.

This is still not all: the diamond is considered as the 'precious stone' *par excellence*. Now, this precious stone is also, as such, a symbol of Christ, who is herein identified with his other symbol, the 'cornerstone'; or let us simply say that these two symbols are thus united into one. It could then be said that this stone, insofar as it represents an 'achievement' or an 'accomplishment'[36] is, in the language of the Hindu tradition, a *chintāmani* which is the equivalent of the Western alchemical expression 'philosophers' stone';[37] and it is very significant in this respect that the Christian Hermetists often speak of Christ as being the true 'philosophers' stone', no less than as being the 'cornerstone'.[38] We are thus brought back to what we said previously about the two senses in which the Arabic expression *rukn al-arkān* can be understood, and of the correspondence that exists between architectural and alchemical symbolism; and to close, with a remark of an altogether general bearing, this already long though no doubt incomplete study—for the subject is one of those that are almost inexhaustible–we can add that this very correspondence is only a particular case of that which likewise exists (though perhaps in a way that is not always so evident) between all the traditional sciences and arts, because they are all just so many manifestations and applications of the same principial and universal truths.

35. The uncut diamond naturally has eight angles, and the sacrificial post (*yupa*) must be made 'of eight angles' (*ashtashri*) to represent the *vajra* (which here is understood also in its other sense of 'thunderbolt'). The Pali word *attansa*, literally, 'of eight angles', means both 'diamond' and 'pillar'.

36. From the 'constructive' viewpoint it is the perfecting of the realisation of the architect's plan; from the alchemical point of view, it is the perfecting or the ultimate end of the 'Great Work'; and there is an exact correspondence between the one and the other.

37. The diamond among stones and gold among metals, both the one and the other, are what is most precious: both, also, are 'luminous' and 'solar'; but the diamond, like the 'philosophers' stone' to which it is here assimilated, is held to be even more precious than gold.

38. The symbolism of the 'cornerstone' is expressly mentioned, for example, in various passages of the Hermetic work of Robert Fludd, cited by A. E. Waite, *The Secret Tradition in Freemasonry*, pp. 27–8. It must be mentioned, moreover, that these texts seem to contain the confusion with the 'foundation stone' which we spoke of at the outset; and what the author, in quoting them, himself says about the cornerstone, in several places in the same book, is hardly better qualified to clarify the question and can only serve to perpetuate still further this same confusion.

46 § *'Lapsit exillis'*

WHILE speaking of the symbolism of the cornerstone, we had occasion to mention incidentally the *lapsit exillis* of Wolfram von Eschenbach. It might be interesting to give more specific attention to this question because of the many parallels which it suggests. Under its strange form,[1] this enigmatic expression may comprise more than one meaning. It is certainly, before all else, a kind of phonetic contraction of *lapis lapsus ex cœlis*, 'the stone fallen from the sky'. Moreover, this stone, precisely by reason of its origin, is as it were 'in exile' in its earthly sojourn,[2] whence moreover it must finally reascend to the heavens.[3] As regards the symbolism of the Grail, it is to be noted that even though it is most commonly described as a vase and though this is its most widely known form it is also sometimes described as a stone, as in fact it is by Wolfram von Eschenbach. Furthermore, it can be both simultaneously, for the vase is said to have been cut from a previous stone which, having fallen from the forehead of Lucifer at the time of his fall, had likewise 'fallen from heaven'.[4]

On the other hand, what seems to increase even more the complexity of this symbolism, but which can in reality provide the 'key' to certain connections, is this: as we have already explained elsewhere, if the Grail is a vase (*grasale*), it is also a book (*gradale* or *graduale*); and in certain versions of the legend, there is mention in this respect not exactly of a book in the ordinary sense but of an inscription traced on the cup by an angel or by Christ himself. Inscriptions of similarly 'non-human' origin also appeared in certain circumstances on the *lapsit exillis*,[5] which was thus a 'talking stone', or, we might say, an 'oracular stone'; for if a stone can 'speak' by emitting sounds, it can do so quite as well (like the shell of the tortoise in the Far Eastern Tradition) by means of characters or figures appearing on its surface. Now, what is also very remarkable from this point of view, is that the Biblical

1. A. E. Waite, in his work on *The Holy Grail*, gives the variants *lapis exilis* and *lapis exilix*, for it seems that the spelling differs according to the manuscript. He also points out that, according to the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (citing Arnold of Villeneuve), *lapis exilis* was among the alchemists one of the designations of the 'philosophers' stone', which naturally must be linked with the considerations we have indicated at the end of the same study.

2. *Lapis exili* or *lapis exsulis*, according to the interpretations suggested by Waite as possible in this regard.

3. We do not think there are grounds for taking much account of the Latin word *exilis*, taken in its literal sense of 'thin' or 'tenuous', unless perhaps one should intend to associate with it a certain idea of 'subtlety'.

4. On the symbolism of the Grail, see *The Lord of the World*, ch. 5. Also to be mentioned in this connection is the symbol of the *Estoile Internelle*, in which the cup and the precious stone are united even while being in this case distinct from one another.

5. As on the 'black stone' of Ourga, which had to be, like all the 'black stones' playing a part in different traditions, a meteorite, that is, yet again, a 'stone fallen from heaven' (see *The Lord of the World*, ch. 1).

tradition mentions an 'oracular cup', that of Joseph,[6] which in this respect at least could be regarded as one of the forms of the Grail itself; and curiously enough it is another Joseph, Joseph of Arimathea, who is said to have become the possessor or guardian of the Grail and to have brought it from the East to Britain. It is surprising that no notice seems ever to have been taken of these 'coincidences' which, nevertheless, are not insignificant.[7]

To return to *lapsit exillis*, a connection has been made between it and the *Lia Fail* or 'stone of destiny', which was also, in fact, a 'talking stone', and which may have been, in a certain sense, a 'stone from heaven', for according to the Irish legend, the *Tuatha de Danann* had brought it with them from their first abode, which is said to have been 'celestial' or at least 'paradisal'. This *Lia Fail* is known to have been the anointing stone of the ancient kings of Ireland, and it subsequently became that of the kings of England, having been brought by Edward I to Westminster Abbey, according to the most widely held opinion; but strange though it may seem, this same stone is, on the other hand, identified with the one which Jacob consecrated at Bethel.[8] Nor is that all: according to the Hebrew tradition it would also seem to have been the stone which followed the Israelites in the desert and from which flowed the water they drank of,[9] and which according to St Paul's interpretation was none other than Christ himself.[10] It is then supposed to have become the *shethiyah* or 'foundation stone', placed in the Temple of Jerusalem beneath the Ark of the Covenant,[11] and thus marking symbolically the 'centre of the world', likewise represented in another traditional form by the *Omphalos* of Delphi;[12] and since these identifications are obviously symbolic, it can assuredly be said that in all this it is indeed always one and the same stone that is in question.

6. Genesis 44: 5.

7. The 'oracular cup' is in a way the prototype of 'magic mirrors', and there is an important point to be made in this connection: a purely magical interpretation, which reduces symbols to a merely divinatory or 'talismanic' level as the case may be, marks a certain stage in the degeneration of these symbols, or rather of the understanding of them, a stage less advanced, however, than the completely profane deviation that attributes to them a merely 'aesthetic' value, for it does at least refer to a traditional science. On the subject of the 'divinatory cup', it is to be noted also that the vision of all things as present, if this is understood in its true sense (the only sense to which can be attached the 'infallibility' explicitly in question in the case of Joseph), is clearly related to the symbolism of the 'third eye', and thus also of the stone fallen from Lucifer's forehead where it had occupied the place of the 'third eye'. It is moreover by his fall that man himself lost the 'third eye', that is, the 'sense of eternity', which the Grail restores to whoever succeeds in winning it.

8. *The Lord of the World*, ch. 9.

9. Exodus 17: 5. The drink given by this stone should be compared with the food provided by the Grail, considered as the 'vase of abundance'.

10. I Corinthians 10: 4. Let us note the relationship between the anointing of the stone by Jacob, that of kings at their crowning, and the person of Christ or of the Messiah who is literally the Anointed *par excellence*.

11. In the symbolism of the *Sephiroth*, this 'foundation' is related to *Iesod*. The 'cornerstone', to which we are going to return shortly, is related to *Kether*.

12. Again, cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 9. The *Omphalos*, moreover, was a baetyl, a designation identical to *Beth-el*, or 'house of God'.

It must be clearly understood, nevertheless, as regards the symbolism of building, that the foundation stone just mentioned must in no way be confused with the 'cornerstone', which is the crown of the edifice, while the other is at the centre of its base;[13] and inasmuch as it is central, it likewise differs from the 'foundation stone' in the ordinary sense, which is at one of the angles of the same base. We have already said that the foundation stones of the four angles reflect, as it were, the true 'cornerstone' or 'summit stone', and participate in it; again, in the present context, a reflection can also be spoken of, but this time the relationship is more direct than in the previous case, for the 'summit stone' and the 'foundation stone' are on the same vertical line so that the 'foundation stone' is as the horizontal projection of the 'summit stone' on to the level of the foundation.[14] It could be said that the 'foundation stone' synthesizes in itself, even while remaining on the same level, the partial aspects represented by the stones of the four angles (this partial character being expressed by the obliquity of the lines which join them to the summit of the edifice). In fact, the central 'foundation stone' and the 'cornerstone' are respectively the base and the summit of the axial pillar, whether this pillar is represented visibly or whether it has only an 'ideal' existence. In this last case, the 'foundation stone' can be a hearthstone or an altar stone (which, moreover, is the same in principle) and which in any case corresponds in a way to the very 'heart' of the edifice.

We have said, as regards the cornerstone, that it represents the 'stone come down from heaven'; and we have now seen that the *lapsit exillis* is more precisely the 'stone fallen from heaven', which might suggest a certain relationship with the 'stone which the builders had rejected', if from the cosmic perspective these 'builders' are considered as the Angels or *Devas*;[15] but since every descent is not necessarily a fall,[16] there is scope for a certain differentiation between the two expressions. In any case, the idea of a 'fall' could no longer apply in any sense once the cornerstone occupies its

13. Not being angular, that is, not being placed at one of the angles, the central 'foundation stone' cannot, in this respect at least, be confused with the 'cornerstone', in connection with which we therefore did not need to speak of it.

14. This corresponds to what we have already pointed out on the subject of the horizontal projection of the pyramid, the summit of which is projected onto the meeting point of the diagonals of the base square, that is, at the very centre of this square. In operative Masonry, the positioning of a building was determined—before construction began—by what is called the 'method of the five points', which consisted of fixing first the four angles where the first four stones were to be placed, then the centre, that is, the meeting point of the diagonals of the base which is normally square or rectangular. The pegs that marked these five points were called *landmarks*, which is doubtless the primary and original sense of this Masonic term.

15. Who must be regarded as working under the direction of *Vishvakarma* who is, as we have already explained on other occasions, the same as the 'Grand Architect of the Universe' (cf., especially *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 3).

16. It goes without saying that this remark applies above all to the descent of the *Avatāra*, even though his presence in the terrestrial world can also be like an 'exile', but only according to outward appearances.

definitive position at the summit.[17] We can still speak of a 'descent' if the building is thought of as part of a more extensive whole (as when we drew attention to the fact that the stone cannot be put in place except from above); but if this edifice is considered only in itself, along with the symbolism of its different parts, then this very position can be called 'celestial', as the base and the roof correspond respectively, as regards their 'cosmic model', to earth and heaven.[18] Let us add (and this will be our closing remark) that all that is situated on the axis at various levels can, in a certain way, be considered as representing different situations of one and the same thing, situations which are themselves related to different conditions of a being or of a world, according to whether the standpoint is 'microcosmic' or 'macrocosmic'; and in this respect, as applied to the human being, we will simply point out that the relationship between the 'foundation stone' of the centre and the 'cornerstone' of the summit are not unconnected with what we have said elsewhere about the different 'localisations' of the *luz* or the 'kernel of immortality.'[19]

47 § *Al-Arkān*

By way of addition to what we have already said about the 'cornerstone' we think it will not be without interest to give some further details about a particular point, which has to do with our references to the Arabic word *rukn*, angle, and its different meanings. In this connection our main purpose is to draw attention to a very remarkable concordance to be found in early Christian symbolism, a concordance on which light is thrown (as always) by the comparisons that can be made with certain data from other traditions. We propose to speak of the *gammadion*, or rather, we should say, of the *gammadia*, for this symbol has two forms that are distinctly different though the same meaning is generally given to each. It owes its name to the elements which it is made up of in both its variants and which, being in fact try-squares, are shaped like the Greek letter *gamma*.[1]

The first form of this symbol (*figure* 16), sometimes also called the 'cross of

17. It would be so only when, before being put in place, this same stone were to be considered in its state of 'rejection'.

18. See 'The Symbolism of the Dome' [41 above] and also *The Great Triad*, ch. 14.

19. This connection with the *luz* is clearly suggested, moreover, by the parallels we have pointed out above with Bethel and with the 'third eye' (see on this subject *The Lord of the World*, ch. 7).

1. See *Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 10. As we noted then, it is these *gammadia* which are the true 'gammadian crosses', and it is only today that this designation has been applied to the *swastika*, a mistake which can only cause an unfortunate confusion between two entirely different symbols which in no way have the same meaning.

Figure 16

the Word',[2] consists of four try-squares, the right-angled summits of which are turned towards the centre. The cross is formed by the try-squares themselves, or more precisely by the empty space between their parallel sides which as it were represents four ways, starting from the centre or ending there, according to the direction they are traversed in. Now this same figure, considered as the representation of a crossroads, is the primitive form of the Chinese character *hing*, which designates the five elements: we see here the four regions of space which correspond to the cardinal points, and which are in fact called 'try-squares' (*fang*),[3] around the central area to which the fifth element is related. These elements,[4] despite a partial similarity of name, cannot be identified in any way with those of the Hindu tradition and of Western antiquity, so that, to avoid all confusion, it would doubtless be better, as some have suggested, to translate *hing* by 'natural agents', inasmuch as they are forces acting within the corporeal world and not constitutive elements of the bodies themselves. It is none the less true, as is clear from their spatial correspondence, that the five *hing* may be regarded as the *arkān* of this world, just as are, from another point of view, the elements in the ordinary sense, though with a difference as to the meaning of the central element. For while ether, not being on the same basic level as the other elements, corresponds to the true 'cornerstone', that of the summit (*rukn al-arkān*), the 'earth' of the Far Eastern tradition must be placed in direct correspondence with the 'foundation stone' of the centre, of which we have previously spoken.[5]

The representation of the five *arkān* appears still more clearly in the other form of the *gammadion* (*figure* 17) where four try-squares, forming the angles

2. The reason for this (according to the general meaning of the symbol) is that it is held to represent the Word expressing itself by the Four Gospels. It is to be noted that, in this interpretation, these must be considered as corresponding to four points of view (symbolically related to the 'quarters' of space), the reunion of which is necessary for the integral expression of the Word, just as the four try-squares form the cross by joining at their summits.

3. The try-square, in the Far Eastern tradition, is essentially the instrument used to 'measure the Earth'; cf., *The Great Triad*, ch.15 and 16. It is easy to see the relationship between this *gammadion* and the square divided into nine parts (*ibid.* ch. 16) which can be obtained simply by filling in the outline of a square round the outside of the *gammadion* and joining the summits of the try-squares so as to enframe the central section.

4. These are: water to the North, fire to the South, wood to the East, metal to the West, and earth at the Centre. It will be seen that there are three designations in common with the elements of other traditions but that earth none the less does not have here the same spatial correspondence.

5. It should be noted, in this connection, that the mound raised at the centre of a country truly corresponds to the altar or hearth placed at the central point of an edifice.

Figure 17

(*arkān* in the literal sense of the word) of a square, surround a cross drawn in its centre. The summits of the try-squares are then turned outwards instead of towards the centre as in the previous case.[6] Here we can consider the entire figure as corresponding to the horizontal projection of an edifice onto its foundation plane: the four try-squares then correspond to the foundation stones of the four angles (which in fact must be cut 'on the square'), and the cross to the 'cornerstone' of the summit which, though not being on the same level, is projected onto the centre of the foundation according to the direction of the vertical axis; and the symbolic assimilation of Christ to the 'cornerstone' justifies this correspondence still more explicitly.

In fact, from the standpoint of Christian symbolism both the *gammadia* are considered as representing Christ, he himself being the cross in the middle of the four Evangelists, who are represented by the try-squares. The whole is thus the equivalent of the well known figuration of Christ himself in the midst of the four animals of the vision of Ezekiel and of the Apocalypse,[7] these animals being the most usual symbols of the Evangelists,[8] whose assimilation to the foundation stones of the four angles is moreover in no way out of keeping with the fact that St Peter, on the other hand, is expressly designated as the 'foundation stone' of the Church. We have simply to see in this the expression of two different points of view, one referring to doctrine and the other to the constitution of the Church; and it is certainly incontestable, as regards Christian doctrine, that the Gospels are very truly its foundations.

In the Islamic tradition, a similarly arranged figure is also to be found, comprising the name of the Prophet at the centre and those of the first four *Khulafā*, at the corners. Here again, the Prophet, appearing as *rukn al-arkān*, must be considered, like Jesus Christ in the preceding figure, as situated at a level other than that of the base, and consequently he also corresponds to the 'cornerstone' of the summit. Moreover, it must be noted that, of the two points of view that we have just indicated as regards Christianity, this representation directly recalls the one which looks on St Peter as the

6. The summits of the four try-squares and the centre of the cross, being the four angles and the centre of the square, correspond to the 'five points' by which the exact site of an edifice was traditionally determined.

7. These four symbolic animals, moreover, correspond to the four *Mahārājas* who, in the Hindu and Tibetan traditions, are the regents of the cardinal points and of the 'quarters' of space.

8. In a very similar way, the ancient Egyptian tradition represented Horus in the midst of his four sons. Moreover, in the first years of Christianity, in Egypt, Horus was frequently taken as a symbol of Christ.

'foundation stone', for it is obvious that St Peter, as we have already said, is also the *Khalīfah*, that is, the 'vicar' or the 'substitute' of Christ. But in this case only a single 'foundation stone' is considered, the first of the four stones to be put into place, without developing the correspondence any further, while the Islamic symbol in question includes all four foundation stones. The reason for this difference is that the first four *Khulafā'* have, in fact, a special function with regard to 'sacred history', while in Christianity, the first successors of St Peter have no characteristic which might distinguish them, in a comparable way, from those who came after them. It may be added, in connection with the five *arkān* manifested in the terrestrial and human world, that the Islamic tradition also considers five celestial or angelic *arkān*, who are *Jibrīl*, *Rufā'īl*, *Mīkāl*, *Isrāfīl*, and lastly *ar-Rūḥ*, (the Spirit) who is identified with *Metatron* as we have explained on other occasions. He also is ranked at a level higher than that of the four others, who are his partial reflections in different and more particularised or less principial functions, and in the celestial world, he is truly *rukn al-arkān*, he who, at the boundary separating *al-Khalq* (creation), from *al-Ḥaqq* (truth, reality), is at that very 'place' through which alone an exit from the Cosmos can be effected.

48 § Gathering What Is Scattered[1]

In *The Great Triad* (ch. 6) with reference to the *Ming-Tang* and the *Tien-ti-Houei*, we have cited a Masonic formula according to which the task of the Masters is 'to diffuse the light and to gather that which is scattered'. In fact, the comparison that we made then bore only upon the first part of this formula.[2] As to the second part, which may seem more enigmatic, it has some remarkable connections in traditional symbolism, nor do we think it would be without interest to make here some observations which could not be included on that other occasion.

In order to understand as completely as possible what is involved, it is advisable to refer first of all to the Vedic tradition which is particularly explicit in this respect: 'what has been scattered' is the dismembered body of the primordial *Purusha* who was divided at the first sacrifice accomplished by the *Devas* at the beginning, and from whom, by this very division, were born all manifested beings.[3] It is obvious that we have here a symbolic description of the passage from unity to multiplicity, without which there could not in fact be any manifestation whatsoever; and this makes it already

1. Cf., [Luke 11:3; 'He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.' Similarly Matt. 12: 30. Tr.]

2. The devise of the *Tien ti-Houei* that was in question is in fact this: 'To destroy the darkness (*tsing*), to restore the light (*ming*)'.

3. See *Rig Veda* 10: 90.

clear that the 'gathering of what is scattered', or the reconstitution of *Purusha* as he was 'before the beginning', if such an expression is permissible, that is, in the state of non-manifestation, is nothing other than the return to principial unity. This *Purusha* is identical with *Prajāpati*, 'the Lord of beings brought forth', all of whom have issued forth from him and are thus considered in a certain sense as his 'progeny'.[4] He is also *Vishvakarma*, that is, the 'Grand Architect of the Universe', and, as *Vishvakarma*, it is he himself who accomplishes the sacrifice while at the same time he is the victim thereof;[5] and if it is said that he is sacrificed by the *Devas*, this makes no difference in reality, for the *Devas* are after all nothing other than the 'powers' that he carries within himself.[6]

We have already said, on several occasions, that every ritual sacrifice must be looked on as an image of this first cosmogonic sacrifice;[7] and in every sacrifice, as Ananda Coomaraswamy has remarked, 'the *Brāhmanas* abound with evidence that the victim is a representation of the sacrificer himself, or as the texts express it, is the sacrificer himself. In accordance with the universal rule that initiation (*dikṣā*) is a death and a rebirth, it is clear that the 'initiate is the oblation' (*Taittiriya Samhita* 6: 1. 4), 'the victim is substantially the sacrificer himself' (*Aitareya Brāhmana* 2: 2).[8] This leads us directly to the Masonic symbolism of the grade of Master, in which the initiated is identified in fact with the victim. Moreover, the relationship of the legend of Hiram with the myth of Osiris has often been emphasised so that, when it comes to 'gathering that which is scattered', we think immediately of Isis gathering together the scattered members of Osiris. Essentially, however, the scattering of the members of Osiris is precisely the same thing as that of the members of *Purusha* or of *Prajāpati*: these are just two versions of the description of the same cosmogonic process in two different traditional forms. It is true that in the case of Osiris and in that of Hiram, it is no longer a question of a sacrifice, at least not explicitly, but of a murder; but even that does not change anything essentially, for it is really the same thing that is considered under two complementary aspects, as a sacrifice under its 'devic' aspect, and as a murder under its 'asuric' aspect.[9] Suffice it to note this point in passing, for to dwell on it

4. The Sanskrit *prajā* is identical to the Latin progenies.

5. In the Christian conception of sacrifice, Christ, too, is both victim and priest *par excellence*.

6. Commenting on the passage of the *Rig Veda* hymn mentioned above in which it is said that it is 'by the sacrifice that the *Devas* offered the sacrifice', Sāyana says that the *Devas* are the forms of the breath (*prāna-rūpa*) of *Prajāpati*. Cf., what we have said on the subject of angels in 'Monothéisme et angélologie' [*Etudes Traditionnelles*, October-November 1946. The angels are, in the Judaic, Christian and Islamic traditions, the exact equivalent of the *Devas* in the Hindu tradition.] It is to be understood, of course, that in all this it is always a question of aspects of the divine Logos with which Universal Man is in fact identical.

7. ['. . .the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world', Apocalypse 13: 8. Tr.]

8. 'Atma-yajna: Self-sacrifice', in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, February 1942.

9. Cf., the murder and dismemberment, in the Greek mysteries, of *Zagreus* by the Titans, these being the equivalents of the *Asuras* of the Hindu tradition. It may be noted, on the other hand, that current language itself applies the same word 'victim' both in the case of sacrifice and in that of murder.

would mean entering into unduly long developments not relevant to the question we are now considering.

Again, in the Hebraic Kabbala—though here it is no longer really a question of either sacrifice or of murder, but rather a kind of 'disintegration', the consequences of which are, moreover, the same—it was from the fragmentation of the body of *Adam Qadmon* that the Universe was formed with all the beings that it contains, so that these are like particles of this body, their 'reintegration' into unity corresponding to the reconstitution of *Adam Qadmon*, who is 'Universal Man'; and *Purusha*, according to one sense of this word, is also 'Man' *par excellence*. In all this, then, it is always exactly the same thing that is being symbolised. Let us add, before going further, that since the grade of Master represents, virtually at least, the accomplishment of the Lesser Mysteries, what is to be understood in this case is strictly speaking the reintegration at the centre of the human state. But the same symbolism is always applicable to different levels in virtue of the correspondences that exist between them,[10] so that it may be referred either to a given world, or to universal manifestation as a whole; and the reintegration into the 'primordial state', which is also the 'Adamic' state, prefigures as it were the total and final reintegration, even though in reality it is but a step on the way that leads to it.

In the study we cited above, Coomaraswamy said that 'the essential, in the Sacrifice, in the first place is to divide, and in the second place to reunite'. It includes, therefore, the two complementary poles of 'disintegration' and 'reintegration' which constitute the cosmic process in its entirety: *Purusha*, 'being one, becomes many, and being many, he again becomes one'. The reconstitution of *Purusha* is effected symbolically, in particular, in the construction of the Vedic altar, which includes in its different parts a representation of all the worlds;[11] and the sacrifice, to be accomplished correctly, demands the cooperation of all the arts, which assimilates the sacrificer to *Vishvakarma* himself.[12] On the other hand, since every ritual action—that is, every truly normal action that conforms to 'order' (*rita*)—can be regarded as having in a way a 'sacrificial' function, according to the etymological sense of the word (*sacrum facere*), what is true for the Vedic altar is also true in a certain way and in some degree for every construction erected in conformity with traditional rules, these always proceeding in reality from a same 'cosmic model', as we have explained on other occasions.[13] It is clear that this is directly

10. In the same way, in the symbolism of alchemy there is correspondence between the processes of the 'white work' and the 'red work', so much so that the second, in a way, reproduces the first on a higher level.

11. See *'Janua Cœli'* [60 below].

12. Cf., A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, p. 26.

13. The foundation rites of a building generally require a sacrifice or an oblation, in the strict sense of these words. Even in the West a certain form of oblation has been maintained up to the present day in cases where the placing of the first stone is accomplished according to Masonic rites.

related to a 'construction' symbolism such as that of Masonry, and, moreover, even in the most immediate sense, the builder does in fact gather the scattered materials to form of them an edifice which, if it is truly what it ought to be, will have an 'organic' unity comparable to that of a living creature from the microcosmic point of view, or to that of a world from the macrocosmic point of view.

In conclusion there is still something to be said about another kind of symbolism, which may seem very different on the surface, but which nevertheless has in reality an equivalent significance. This is the reconstitution of a word from its literal elements taken initially in isolation.[14] In order to understand this it must be remembered that from a traditional point of view the name of a being is nothing other than the expression of the very essence of this being. The reconstitution of the name, therefore, is symbolically the same thing as the reconstitution of the being itself. The part which letters play in a symbolism like that of the *Kabbala* with regard to creation or universal manifestation, is also well known; it could be said that manifestation is formed by the separated letters which correspond to the multiplicity of its elements, and that to reunite these letters is to bring it back to its Principle if, that is, this reunion is accomplished in such a way as to reconstitute truly the name of the Principle.[15] From this point of view, 'to gather that which is scattered' is the same thing as 'to find the lost Word' for, in reality and in its most profound sense, this 'lost Word' is nothing other than the name of the 'Great Architect of the Universe'.

49 § The Black and the White

THE Masonic symbol of the 'mosaic pavement' (*tessellated pavement*) is among those that are often insufficiently understood or badly interpreted. This pavement is formed of alternating black and white squares, arranged in exactly the same way as the squares of a chess or checker board. The symbolism is obviously the same in the board as in the pavement, for as we have said on various occasions, games were originally something quite different from the mere profane amusements that they have become today; and chess moreover is certainly one of those games in which traces of the original 'sacredness' have remained most apparent in spite of this degeneration.

14. In Masonic ritual this naturally corresponds to the mode of communication of 'sacred words'.

15. As long as one remains within the multiplicity of manifestation, one can only 'spell' the name of the Principle by discerning the reflection of its attributes in creatures wherein they are expressed only in a fragmentary and scattered way. The Mason who has not reached the grade of Master is still unable 'to gather that which is scattered', and this is why he 'knows only how to spell'.

In the most immediate sense, the juxtaposition of white and black naturally represents light and darkness, day and night, and consequently all the pairs of opposites or of complementaries (it is hardly necessary to recall that what is opposition at a certain level becomes complementarity at another, so that the same symbolism is equally applicable to both); in this respect then, we have here the exact equivalent of the Far Eastern symbol of the *yin-yang*.[1] It can even be noted that the interpenetration and the inseparability of the two aspects *yin* and *yang*, represented by the fact that the two halves of the figure are bounded by a sinuous line, are also represented on the board by the intermingling of the two kinds of squares, whereas another arrangement, as for example that of rectilinear bands alternately white and black, would not bring out the same idea so clearly, and could even give the impression of juxtaposition purely and simply.[2]

There would be no point in repeating here all that we have already said elsewhere about the *yin-yang*; we will simply recall, in particular, that there must not be seen in this symbolism, any more than in the recognition of the cosmic dualities of which it is the expression, the affirmation of any 'dualism'; for if these dualities really exist in their own order, their terms are none the less derived from the unity of a single principle (the *Tai-ki* of the Far Eastern tradition). This, in fact, is one of the most important points, for it is this especially which gives rise to false interpretations. Some have believed that they can speak of 'dualism' in connection with the *yin-yang*, probably through misunderstanding, but sometimes perhaps with more or less dubious intentions. In any case, as far as the 'mosaic pavement' is concerned, such an interpretation is most often the work of adversaries of Masonry who would like to make it the basis of an accusation of 'Manicheism'. It is certainly quite possible that some 'dualists' themselves may have diverted this symbolism from its true meaning in order to interpret it according to their own doctrines, just as for the same reason they have been able to alter symbols expressing a unity and an immutability inconceivable to them; but these are in any case no more than heterodox deviations which do not in any way affect the symbolism in itself; and from the strictly initiatic point of view, deviations of this kind are not worth considering.[3]

1. See *The Great Triad*, ch. 4. We had occasion to read an article in which the author related the white part to *yin* and the black part to *yang*, whereas it is the contrary that is true; he claimed to base this erroneous opinion on 'radiesthetic' experiments. What conclusion is to be drawn from this, other than that the result so obtained is quite simply due to the influence of the experimenter's preconceived ideas?

2. This last arrangement has nevertheless also been used in certain cases; it was to be found, for example, in the *Beaucéant* of the Templars [one of their standards on which was a black horse with white feet] where the meaning is again the same.

3. In this connection, we will also recall what we said elsewhere on the question of the 'reversal of symbols', and more especially the remark we made then on the truly diabolic nature of attributing to orthodox symbolism, and particularly to the symbolism of initiatic organisations, interpretations twisted into reverse, such reversals being in reality the work of the counter-initiation. (*The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 30).

Now, beyond the meaning we have spoken of so far, there is another that is more profound, and this results directly from the double significance of the colour black, which we have explained on other occasions. We have just been considering only its lower and cosmological meaning, but we must also consider its higher and metaphysical meaning. A particularly clear example of this is to be found in the Hindu tradition, where the one who is being initiated must be seated on the hide of black and white hair, symbolising respectively the unmanifested and the manifested.[4] The fact that it is a question here of an essentially initiatic rite sufficiently justifies the comparison with the example of the 'mosaic pavement' and the express attribution of the same meaning to that also, even if in the present state of affairs this meaning has been completely forgotten. Thus, we have here a symbolism equivalent to that or *Arjuna*, the 'white', and of *Krishna*, the 'black', who are, in the being itself, the mortal and the immortal, the 'me' and the 'Self';[5] and since these are also the 'two birds inseparably united' of the *Upanishads*, this evokes yet another symbol, that of the two-headed white and black eagle which figures in certain high Masonic grades—a further example which, after so many others, shows once more that symbolic language is truly universal.

50 § Black Stone and Cubic Stone

OCCASIONALLY we have had to call attention to the diverse linguistic fantasies which the name Cybele has engendered. We shall not return to those which are too obviously devoid of any foundation and which are due only to the excessive imagination of certain people;[1] we will consider only

4. *Satapatha Brāhmana* 3: 2, 1, 5–7. On another level these two colours also represent Heaven and Earth, but it must be noted that by reason of their correspondence with the unmanifested and the manifested, it is then black which is linked to Heaven and white to the Earth, so that the relations existing in the *yin-yang* are inverted; this, moreover, is only an application of the inverse sense of analogy. The initiate must touch the junction of the black and white hairs, thus uniting the complementary principles from which he is to be born as a 'Son of Heaven and of Earth' (cf., *The Great Triad*, ch. 9).

5. This is also the symbolism of the Dioscuri. The relation of these with the two hemispheres or the two halves of the World Egg brings us back to the consideration of Heaven and Earth, which we indicated in the previous note (cf., *The Great Triad*, ch. 5).

1. So we will say no more about the assimilation of Cybele to a 'mare' (*cavale*), nor about the parallel that some have sought to draw with 'chivalry', nor about the equally imaginary connection with the Kabbala. [The information on Cybele (sometimes Kybele) available on a popular level is obviously from a degenerate period. She was the 'Great Mother' or *Magna Mater* of Phrygia in Asia Minor, and was associated with Mt Ida, near ancient Troy. Her worship was conducted by eunuch priests called Corybantes, and was characterised by wild revelry and dancing. The Romans associated her with the Titaness Rhea (the Latin Ops). Tr.]

several comparisons which may seem more serious at first sight, even though these also are unjustified. Thus, we have recently seen the supposition put forward that Cybele 'seems to get her name' from the Arabic *qubbah*, because she was adored in the grottos by reason of her 'chthonian' nature. Now, this alleged etymology has two defects, either one of which would suffice to dismiss it: firstly, like another of which we are going to speak shortly, it takes into account only the first two letters of the root of the name Cybele which, however, contains three, and it goes without saying that the third letter is of no less account than the other two; secondly, it is based on no more than a pure and simple misconception. In fact, *qubbah* has never meant 'vault, vaulted hall, crypt', as the author of this hypothesis believes; it means cupola or dome, the symbolism of which is 'celestial' and not 'terrestrial', and therefore exactly the opposite of the nature attributed to Cybele or the 'Great Mother'. As we have explained elsewhere the cupola surmounts an edifice with a square base and therefore, generally speaking, with a body of cubic form, and it is that square or cubic part which, in the whole thus constituted, has a 'terrestrial' symbolism. This leads us directly to the examination of another hypothesis which has often been formulated about the origin of the name Cybele, and which has a more particular importance for what concerns us here.

Efforts have been made to derive *Kubele* from *kubos*, and here at least there is no misunderstanding such as the one we have just noted. But on the other hand, this etymology has in common with the preceding one the defect of taking into consideration only the first two of the three letters constituting the root of *Kubele*, which makes it equally impossible from a strictly linguistic point of view.[2] If it is only a question of seeing, between these two words, a certain phonetic similarity which, as often happens, may have some value from the symbolic point of view, that is something altogether different; but before examining this point more closely, let us say that, in reality, the name *Kubele* is not of Greek origin and that there is nothing enigmatic or doubtful about its true etymology. It is in fact directly linked to the Hebrew *gebal* and to the Arabic *jabal*, 'mountain'; the difference of the first letter cannot justify any objection to this, for the change of *g* into *k*, or inversely, is but a secondary modification of which many other examples can be found.[3]

2. We will point out, incidentally, that it is even very doubtful, despite a synonymy and a partial phonetic similarity, that there could be a true linguistic kinship between the Greek *Kubos* and the Arabic *Kaʿb*, because of the presence in the second word of the letter *ʿayn*. This letter has no equivalent in European languages and cannot really be transliterated, so that Westerners too often forget it or discount it, whence the many erroneous assimilations between words of which the roots are clearly different.

3. Thus the Hebrew and Arabic word *kabīr* has an obvious kinship with the Hebrew *gibor* and the Arabic *jabbār*. It is true that the first has the meaning especially of 'great' and the two others that of 'strong', but this is only a nuance; the *Giborim* of *Genesis* are simultaneously 'giants' and 'mighty men'.

Cybele is thus the 'goddess of the mountain';[4] and what is very worthy of note is that, by this signification, her name is the exact equivalent of that of *Parvati* in the Hindu tradition.

This same meaning of the name Cybele is clearly linked to that of the 'black stone' which was her symbol. In fact, it is known that this stone was of conical shape and, like all the 'bætyls' of the same form, it must be considered as a miniature representation of the mountain as 'axial symbol'. On the other hand, since the sacred 'black stones' are meteorites, this 'celestial' origin suggests that the 'chthonian' nature we alluded to at the outset corresponds in reality only to one of the aspects of Cybele. Moreover, the axis represented by the mountain is not 'terrestrial', but connects heaven and earth to one another; and we will add that it is along this axis that, symbolically, the fall of the 'black stone' must take place as well as its final reascension; for here too it is a question of the relations between heaven and earth.[5] There can be no question, of course, of contesting the fact that Cybele has often been assimilated to the 'Earth Mother', but only of indicating that she also had other aspects; moreover, it is quite possible that the more or less complete forgetting of these, following upon a predominance attributed to the 'terrestrial' aspect, may have given birth to certain confusions, and in particular to the one that has led to the classing together of the 'black stone' and the 'cubic stone' which are, however, two very different symbols.[6]

The 'cubic stone' is essentially a 'foundation stone'. It is therefore, indeed 'earthly', as its form likewise indicates; and what is more, the idea of 'stability' expressed by this same form[7] is in perfect conformity with the function of Cybele as 'Earth-Mother', that is, as representing the 'substantial' principle of universal manifestation. This is why, from the symbolic point of view, the relation of Cybele with the 'cube' is not to be entirely rejected as a phonetic 'convergence'; but clearly, this is no reason for seeking to extract from it an etymology, or for

4. Let us note in passing that *Gebal* was also the name of the Phoenician city of Byblos; its inhabitants were called *Giblim*, and this word has remained as a password in Masonry. In this connection, there is a comparison which it seems no one has ever thought of making; whatever may have been the historical origin of the denomination of the mediaeval Ghibellines (*Ghibellini*) it is most strikingly like the name *Giblim*, and even if this is only a 'coincidence', it is at least quite a remarkable one.

5. In connection with this, see *'Lapsit exillis'* [46 above].

6. We have called attention in a review [*Etudes Traditionnelles*, January-February, 1946] to the incredible supposition of the existence of a so-called 'goddess Kaaba' who supposedly would have been represented by the 'black stone' of Mecca which is also called *Kaʿbah*. This is another example of the same confusion, and since then we have had the surprise of again reading the same thing elsewhere, which shows that this error is current in certain Western circles. We will recall, therefore, that the *Kaʿbah* is in no way the name of the 'black stone', which in any case is not a cube; it is the name of the cubic building in one corner of which this stone is set; and if the *Kaʿbah* is also *Bayt Allāh* ('house of God', like the *Beth-El* of Genesis, it has none the less never been considered itself as a divinity. Moreover, it is very probable that the peculiar invention of the so called 'goddess *Kaaba*' was in fact suggested by the above-mentioned comparison of *Kubele* and *Kubos*.

7. See *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 20.

identifying with the 'cubic stone' a 'black stone' which was really conical. There is only one particular case in which there is a certain connection between the 'black stone' and the 'cubic stone': this is where the cubic stone is not one of the 'foundation stones' placed at the four angles of a building, but rather the *shethiyah* stone at the very centre of its base, corresponding to the point of impact of the fallen 'black stone', just as, on the same vertical axis but at its opposite extremity, the 'corner stone' or 'summit stone' (which, on the contrary, is not of cubic shape), corresponds to the initial and final 'celestial' position of the same 'black stone'. We will not dwell any longer on these considerations, having already treated them in greater detail;[8] and in conclusion, we will simply recall that in a general way the symbolism of the 'black stone', with the different positions and shapes it may take, is related from the microcosmic point of view, to the various 'localizations' of the *luz* or 'kernel of immortality' in the human being.

51 § Brute Stone, Hewn Stone

In an article on altars—which among the ancient Hebrews had to be made exclusively of unhewn stones—we have read the somewhat amazing remark: 'The symbolism of uncut stone has been altered by Freemasonry, which has transposed it from the sacred domain to the profane level; a symbol originally intended to express the supernatural relationships of the soul with the 'living' and 'personal' God, henceforth expresses realities of an alchemical, moralising, social and occultist nature'.[1] The author of these lines, from all that we know of him, is one of those with whom prejudice can easily go so far as bad faith; that an initiatic organisation should have lowered a symbol 'to the profane level' is something so absurd and contradictory that we do not believe that anyone can seriously maintain it; and, on the other hand, the emphasis on the words 'living' and 'personal' obviously shows a decided intention of limiting the 'sacred domain' solely to the point of view of religious exoterism! That the great majority of contemporary Masons now no longer understand the true meaning of their symbols, just as the majority of Christians no longer understand theirs, is quite another question. How can Masonry, any more than the Church, be held responsible for a state of affairs which is due only to the conditions of the modern world, with regard to which both are equally 'anachronistic' in virtue of their traditional nature?[2] The moralising

8. See again, *'Lapsit exillis'* [46 above].

1. [Cf., Exodus 20: 25. Tr.]

2. [This observation is now, of course, somewhat anachronistic itself; for the Roman Catholic Church, especially, has greatly compromised its traditional character in the fifty-odd years since these remarks were written—a process which, as Guénon noted more than once, had begun long before. Tr.]

tendency which has in fact been only too real since the eighteenth century, was after all an almost inevitable consequence, if one takes into account the general mentality, of the 'speculative' degeneration on which we have so often insisted. The same can be said of the excessive importance given to the social point of view, and the Masons of our times are very far from constituting an exception in these matters. Let an impartial examination be made of what is taught today in the name of the Church, and then let us be told if it is possible to find there much else besides moral and social concerns! But to end these remarks, it is hardly necessary to underline the impropriety, probably deliberate, of the word 'occultist', for Masonry certainly has nothing to do with occultism, being far earlier, even in its 'speculative' form. As to alchemical or more correctly Hermetic symbolism, there is certainly nothing profane here; and it relates, as we have explained elsewhere, to the Lesser Mysteries which are indeed the very domain of the craft initiations in general and of Masonry in particular.

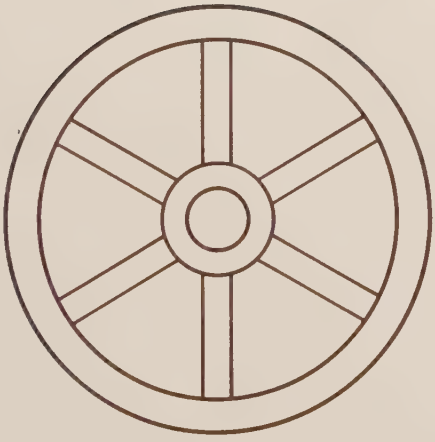
It was not only to make these points, however necessary they may be, that we started by quoting that remark, but above all because it seemed to give us a good opportunity to mention some facts, not without importance, about the symbolism of unhewn stone and shaped stone. The truth is that in Masonry unhewn stone has a meaning other than the one it has in the case of Hebrew altars and, be it added, of megalithic monuments. But if that is so, it is because the meaning does not refer to the same kind of tradition. This is easy to understand for all those who are familiar with the explanations we have given elsewhere on the essential differences that exist, in quite a general way, between the traditions of nomadic peoples and those of sedentary folk;[3] and when Israel passed from the first of these conditions to the second, the interdiction against erecting structures of dressed stone disappeared, for there was no longer any reason for it in this tradition—witness the construction of the Temple of Solomon, which assuredly was not a profane enterprise, and to which is attached, at least symbolically, the very origin of Masonry. It is of little importance in this respect that the altars still had to be made of unhewn stone, for this is a very special case, in which the primitive symbolism could be preserved without any inconvenience, while it is only too obviously impossible to build even the most modest edifice with such stones. Furthermore, that 'there must be nothing metallic' in the altars, as the author of the article in question also notes, relates to another order of ideas, which we have likewise explained and which, moreover, is to be found in Masonry itself with the symbolism of the 'casting off of the metals'.

Now it cannot be doubted that, in virtue of cyclic laws, 'prehistoric' peoples such as those who erected the megalithic monuments, whoever they may have been, were necessarily in a state nearer the Principle than those who came after them. But it is also certain that this state could not have endured indefinitely and that supervening changes in the conditions of humanity in the

3. [See *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 21 and 22].

different periods of its history were bound to call for successive adaptations of the tradition; that this could have happened even within the existence of a single people and without any break in its continuity is shown by the example we have just mentioned in connection with the Hebrews. On the other hand, and we have stated it elsewhere, it is also quite certain that with sedentary peoples the substitution of sanctuaries in stone for structures of wood corresponds to a more marked degree of 'solidification', in conformity with the stages of cyclic 'descent'. But once such a way of construction became necessary because of the new conditions of its setting, it was necessary in a traditional civilisation that it should receive from the tradition itself, by appropriate rites and symbols, the consecration that alone could legitimise it and so integrate it into that civilisation; and that is why we have spoken of an adaptation in this respect. Such a legitimisation applied to all the crafts, beginning with the shaping of the stones needed for this construction; and it could not be truly effective except on the condition that the practice of each of these crafts be attached to a corresponding initiation; for in the traditional conception of the crafts, each one had to represent the regular application of principles in its own contingent order. It was so always and everywhere except, naturally, in the modern Western world whose civilisation has lost all traditional quality, and this is true not only of the building trades that we are especially considering here, but also of all those others which likewise became necessary owing to certain circumstances of time or place; and it is to be noted that this legitimisation, with all it involves, was always possible in all cases except only for the purely mechanical trades, which did not come into existence until modern times. Now for the stone cutters and for the builders who used the products of their labour, what could the unhewn stone represent but undifferentiated 'prime matter', or 'chaos', with all its microcosmic as well as macrocosmic correspondences, while the stone completely dressed on all its faces represents, on the contrary, the completion or perfection of the 'work'? Here lies the whole explanation of the difference between the symbolic meaning of the unshaped stone in cases like those of the megalithic monuments and primitive altars, and that of the same unshaped stone in Masonry. We will add, though without being able to develop the point here, that this difference corresponds to a double aspect of *materia prima*, according to whether it is looked on as the 'universal Virgin' or as the 'chaos' which is at the origin of all manifestation. In the Hindu tradition as well, *Prakriti*, while being the pure potentiality which is literally beneath all existence, is also an aspect of the *Shakti*, that is, of the 'Divine Mother'. Of course, these two points of view are in no way exclusive of one another, which justifies the coexistence of altars of brute stone with buildings of hewn stone. These few considerations will show once again that for the interpretation of symbols as in all else, it is always necessary to know how to put everything in its right place, failing which there is a considerable risk of falling into the most blatant errors.

Axial Symbolism and Symbolism of Passage



52 § Symbols of Analogy

It might seem strange to some that one can speak of symbols of analogy; for if, as is often said, symbolism itself is founded on analogy, every symbol, whatever it may be, must be the expression of an analogy. But this way of viewing things is inaccurate; what symbolism is founded upon, in the most general way, are the correspondences that exist between the different orders of reality; but not every correspondence is analogical. We understand analogy here exclusively in its most rigorous sense, that is, according to the Hermetic formula, as the relationship of 'that which is below' with 'that which is above'. This relationship, as we have often explained in connection with the numerous cases wherein we have had occasion to mention it, essentially implies the consideration of the 'inverse relationship' of its two terms. This is, moreover, inscribed so clearly and so obviously in the symbols we are about to speak of that one might be surprised that it should so often have passed unnoticed, even by those who claim to refer to these symbols, but who thereby show their incapacity to understand and interpret them correctly.

The construction of the symbols in question is based on the figure of the wheel with six spokes. As we have already said, the wheel is generally speaking, and above all else a symbol of the world, the circumference representing manifestation which is produced by the spokes that emanate like radii from the centre. But naturally the number of spokes, which differs from case to case, adds other more particular meanings to the symbol. On the other hand, in certain derivative symbols, the circumference itself may not be represented; but, in their geometric construction, these symbols must nevertheless be considered as inscribed within a circumference, and this is why they must be regarded as being linked with the symbol of the wheel, even if the wheel's outermost form, that is to say, the circumference which determines its contour and boundary, should no longer be visibly and explicitly apparent. This absence indicates merely that it is not on manifestation itself, and on the special domain in which manifestation is developed, that attention must be brought to bear in such a case, this domain remaining as it were in a state of indetermination prior to the actual tracing of the circumference.

The simplest figure, and that which serves as the basis for all the others, is the one that consists solely of the six radii and nothing more. Each of these is

in exact opposition to one of the others so that all together they form three diameters, one vertical and the other two oblique and inclined equally on either side of the vertical. If the sun is considered as occupying the centre, these are the six rays of which we spoke in an earlier study,[1] and in this case, the seventh ray is not represented otherwise than by the centre itself. As to the relationship we have indicated with the three dimensional cross, it can be seen at once: the vertical axis remains unchanged, and the two oblique diameters are the projection, onto the plane of the figure, of the two axes forming the horizontal cross. This last consideration, however, while altogether necessary for the complete understanding of the symbol, does not help us to see it as a true representation of analogy; for that it is enough to take the symbol as it is in itself, without any need to compare it with other symbols to which it is related by various aspects of its complex signification.

In Christian symbolism, this figure is what is called the ordinary or simple chrismon. As such it is seen as the union of the two letters I and X, that is, the Greek initials of the two words *Jesous Christos*, and this is a meaning that it seems to have been given from the earliest Christian times. But it goes without saying that this symbol, in itself, is much earlier and is in fact one of those that are found everywhere and at all periods. The Constantinian chrismon, which is formed by the union of the Greek letters X and P, the first two letters of *Christos*, seems at first sight to be derived directly from the simple or common chrismon, whose fundamental arrangement it exactly preserves, and from which it is distinguished only by the addition of a loop at the upper part of the vertical diameter to transform the I into a P. The loop, naturally having a more or less completely circular form, can in this position be considered to correspond to the representation of the solar disc appearing at the summit of the 'World Tree'; and this remark takes on a particular importance in connection with what we will have to say subsequently about the symbolism of the tree.[2]

It is interesting to note that, as regards heraldic symbolism especially, the six radii constitute a kind of general schema according to which the most diverse figures are displayed on the escutcheon. We have only to look, for example, at an eagle or any other heraldic bird, and it is easy to see that the head, the tail, the extremities of the wings and the feet correspond respectively to the points of the six radii; and if we then look at an emblem such as the *fleur-de-lis*, we see the same thing. Nor does it matter, in this last case, what

1. ['The Narrow Gate', 43 above.]

2. Some intermediary forms show, in another way, a kinship between the chrismon and the Egyptian ansate cross [or *ankh*] which may be understood easily from what we have said about the cross of three dimensions. In certain cases, the loop of the P also takes the particular form of the Egyptian symbol of the 'buckle of Horus'. Another variant of the chrismon is represented by the '*quatre de chiffre*' of the old guild marks, the multiple meanings of which demand a special study [see ch. 69 below; '*quatre de chiffre*' is a pratically untranslatable idiom which we have rendered by 'the sign of four'. Tr.] The chrismon is moreover sometimes surrounded by a circle, which assimilates it as clearly as possible to the wheel of six spokes.

might have been the historical origin of the emblem in question, which has given rise to a number of different hypotheses. Whether the *fleur-de-lis* is a flower, which would moreover agree with the equivalence of the wheel and certain floral symbols such as the lotus, the rose and the lily (which has in fact six petals), or whether it may have been originally a spearhead, or a bird, or a bee, the ancient Chaldean symbol of royalty (the hieroglyph *sar*), or even a toad,[3] or yet again, as is more probable, whether it results from a sort of 'convergence' and fusion of several of these figures, reduced to what they have in common and no more, it is always in strict conformity with the schema we are speaking of, and it is this which is of essential importance for determining its chief significance.

On the other hand, if we join the extremities of the six radii two by two, we have the well-known figure of the hexagram or 'seal of Solomon', formed of two equilateral triangles, opposed and interlaced. The six-pointed star, which differs from the seal in that the outer contour alone is drawn, is obviously only a variant of the same symbol. Mediaeval Christian Hermetism saw in the two triangles of the hexagram, among other things, a representation of the union of the two natures, divine and human, in the person of Christ; and the number six, to which this symbol is naturally related, has among its significations those of union and of mediation, which are perfectly relevant here.[4] This same number is also, according to the Hebrew Kabbala, the number of creation (the 'work of six days' of Genesis, related to the six directions of space); and yet again in this respect, the attribution of this symbol to the Word is no less well justified; it is, in fact, like a kind of graphic translation of the *omnia per ipsum facta sunt* of the Gospel of St John.

Now, and it is especially this point that we have been leading up to, the two opposed triangles of the 'seal of Solomon' represent two ternaries of which one is as the reflection or reverse image of the other; and it is herein that this symbol is an exact representation of analogy. In the figure of the six radii, we can also take the two ternaries formed respectively by the extremities of the three upper radii and by those of the three lower radii; being then situated on either side of the plane of reflection, they are separated instead of being interlaced as in the preceding case; but their inverse relationship is exactly the same. In order to bring out more clearly this meaning of the symbol, a part of the horizontal diameter is sometimes shown in the hexagram (and it is to be noted that it is also shown in the *fleur-de-lis*); this horizontal diameter obviously represents the tracing of the plane of reflection or of the

3. This opinion, however bizarre it may seem, must have been accepted long ago, for in the fifteenth century tapestries of the Cathedral of Rheims, the standard of Clovis [late fifth and early sixth centuries Tr.] bears three toads. It is quite possible, moreover, that originally this toad was in fact a frog, an animal which by reason of its metamorphosis, is an ancient symbol of resurrection and which had kept this signification in the Christianity of the first centuries.

4. In Far Eastern symbolism, six strokes arranged differently in the form of parallel lines, likewise represent the middle term of the 'Great Triad', that is to say, the Mediator between heaven and earth, the 'True Man' uniting in himself the two natures, celestial and terrestrial.

'surface of the Waters'. Let us add that there would be yet another representation of the inverse relationship if the two oblique diameters be seen as outlining two cones placed summit to summit, with the vertical diameter as their axis. Here also, since their common summit (which is the very centre of the figure) is located in the plane of reflection, one of these is the inverted image of the other.

Finally, the figure of the six radii, sometimes modified slightly but always perfectly recognisable, also forms the schema of another very important symbol, that of the tree with three branches and three roots, wherein we find yet again the two inverse ternaries of which we have just spoken. This schema, moreover, can be looked at in the two opposite directions, so that the branches can take the place of the roots and vice versa. We will take up this consideration again in a more thorough study of some of the aspects of the symbolism of the 'World Tree'.

53 § The World Tree

We have already spoken of the World Tree on a number of occasions and of its axial symbolism.[1] Without repeating here what has already been said, we will add some remarks bearing on certain more specific points in this symbolism, and in particular on those cases where the tree is inverted, that is, with the roots above and the branches below, a question to which Coomaraswamy has devoted a special study, 'The Inverted Tree'.[2] It is easy to understand that the inversion is above all because the root represents the Principle, while the branches represent the deployment of manifestation. But this general explanation calls for certain additions that are more complex, while being likewise based on the 'inverse sense' of analogy to which the inverted position of the tree clearly refers. In this respect, we have already indicated that it is precisely on the basis of the analogical symbol in the strict sense of the term, that is, on the basis of the figure of the six radii of which the extremities are grouped in two ternaries opposite to one another, that the schema of three branches and three roots is constructed, a schema which, moreover, can be looked at from the two opposite directions, which shows that the two corresponding positions of the tree must relate to two different and complementary

1. See in particular *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 9 and 25.

2. In *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 5, we have cited the texts from the *Katha Upanishad*, 6: 1, and from the *Bhagavad Gītā*, 15: 1, where the tree is presented under this aspect. Coomaraswamy further cites several more such texts which are no less explicit, for example *Rig Veda*, 1: 24, 7, and *Maitri Upanishad* 6: 4. [For the study of his referred to above, see *Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society*, XXIX, 1938, Bangalore; and *Coomaraswamy: Selected Papers, I, Traditional Art and Symbolism*, Bollingen Series LXXXIX, Princeton University Press, 1977. Tr.]

points of view, according to whether it is looked at upwards from below or downwards from above, that is, according to whether the point of view is that of manifestation or that of the Principle.[3]

In support of this consideration, Coomaraswamy mentions the two inverted trees described by Dante[4] as being near the summit of the 'mountain', thus immediately beneath the level of the Earthly Paradise, while, when Paradise is reached, the trees are seen to be restored to their normal position; and thus these trees, which seem to be really only different aspects of the one and only 'Tree', 'are inverted only below that point at which the rectification and regeneration of man takes place'. It is important to note that although the Earthly Paradise actually may still be a part of the cosmos, its position is virtually 'supra-cosmic'; one could say that it represents 'the summit of contingent being' (*bhavāgra*), so that its level is identified with the 'surface of the Waters'. This surface, which must be considered essentially as a 'plane of reflection', brings us back to the symbolism of the image inverted by reflection, which has already been spoken of in connection with analogy: 'that which is above', or higher than the 'surface of the Waters', namely the principial or 'supra-cosmic' domain, is reflected in an inverse sense in 'that which is below', or lower than this same surface, namely what is in the cosmic domain. In other words, all that is above the 'plane of reflection' is upright, and all that is beneath it is inverted. If it is assumed, therefore, that the tree rises above the Waters, what we see for so long as we are in the cosmos is its inverted image, with the roots above and branches below. On the contrary, if we place ourselves above the Waters, we no longer see this image which is now—so to speak—beneath our feet; we see, rather, the source of the image, that is to say, the real Tree which naturally presents itself to us in its upright position. The Tree is always the same, but it is our position in relation to it that has changed, and also, consequently, the viewpoint from which we consider it.

This is likewise confirmed by the fact that in certain Hindu texts two trees are referred to, one cosmic and one supra-cosmic. As these two trees are naturally superposed, the one may be considered the reflection of the other; and at the same time, their trunks are in continuity so that they are as two parts of a single trunk, which corresponds to the doctrine of 'one essence and two natures' in *Brahma*. The equivalent is found in the Zoroastrian tradition with the two *Haoma* trees, the white and the yellow, one celestial

3. We have remarked elsewhere that the ternary tree may be considered as synthesizing in itself unity and duality which, in Biblical symbolism, are represented respectively by the 'Tree of Life' and the 'Tree of Science'. The ternary form is to be found in the three 'columns' of the 'sephirothic tree' of the Kabbala; and it goes without saying that it is the 'column of the middle' which is then strictly axial (see *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 9). In order to relate this form to that of the schema that we have just outlined, it is necessary to unite the extremities of the two lateral 'columns' by two lines crossing the 'column of the middle' at its central point, that is, in *Tifereth*, whose solar character entirely justifies this position of 'radiating' centre.

4. *Purgatorio*, 22–25.

(or rather 'paradisal', as it grows at the summit of Mt Alborj) and the other terrestrial. The second appears as a 'substitute' for the first, for a humanity remote from 'the primordial abode', just as the indirect vision of the image is a 'substitute' for the direct vision of the reality. The *Zohar* also speaks of two trees, one above and the other below; and in some representations, notably on an Assyrian seal, two superposed trees are clearly distinguishable.

The inverted tree is not only a macrocosmic symbol as we have just seen; at times it is also and for the same reasons a microcosmic symbol, that is, a symbol of man. Thus Plato says that 'man is a celestial plant, which means that he is like an inverted tree, of which the roots stretch towards the heavens and the branches below towards the earth'. In our times the occultists have greatly abused this symbolism, which for them is no more than a mere comparison the deeper meaning of which altogether escapes them, and which they interpret in the most grossly 'materialised' way, trying to justify this by anatomical or rather 'morphological' considerations of an extraordinary childishness. This is one example among so many others of how they deform those fragmentary traditional notions which they have sought, without understanding, to incorporate into their own conceptions.[5]

Of the two chief Sanskrit terms for the World Tree, one, *nyagrodha*, gives rise to an interesting observation in our present context, for literally it means 'growing downwards', not only because such growth is in fact represented by that of the aerial roots of the species of tree that bears this name,[6] but also because the symbolic tree itself is considered to be inverted.[7] It is to this position of the tree, therefore, that the *nyagrodha* strictly refers, while the other designation, *ashvattha*, seems to be, originally at least, that of the upright tree, though the subsequent distinction may not have always been made so clearly. This word *ashvattha* is interpreted as meaning 'the station of the horse' (*ashva-stha*), for the horse, here the symbol of *Agni* or of the Sun, or of both at once, must be considered as having come to the end of his course and stopping when the 'World Axis' has been reached.[8] We will recall in this connection that, in various traditions, the image of the sun is also linked to that of the tree in another way, for it is represented as the fruit of the World Tree; it leaves its tree at the beginning of a cycle and comes to rest there at the end, so that in this case, too, the tree is indeed the 'station of the Sun'.[9]

There is still something more to add concerning *Agni*: he is himself identified with the World Tree, whence his name of *Vanaspati* or 'Lord of the Trees'; and

5. The assimilation of man to a tree, but without any allusion to its inverted position, plays a considerable role in the ritual of Carbonarism.

6. [The species *nyagrodha* is commonly known as the 'banyan'. Tr.]

7. Cf., *Aitarēya Brāhmana*, 7: 30; *Satapatha Brāhmana*, 11: 2, 7, 3.

8. Similarly, according to the Greek tradition, the eagles (another solar symbol), setting out from the ends of the earth, came to rest on the *Omphalos* of Delphi, which represents the 'centre of the World'.

9. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 9. The Chinese character which denotes the setting of the sun represents the solar disc alighting on its tree at the end of the day,

this identification, which confers on the axial Tree an igneous nature, relates it clearly to the 'Burning Bush' which, as place and support of manifestation of the Divinity, must also be considered as having a 'central' position. We have previously spoken of the 'column of fire' or of the 'column of smoke' of *Agni*, as replacing in certain cases the tree or pillar as 'axial' representation; the remark just made completes the explanation of this equivalence and gives it all its meaning.[10] In this connection, Coomaraswamy cites a passage from the *Zohar* where the 'Tree of Life'—which, additionally, is described as 'extending from on high downwards', and thus as inverted—is represented as a 'Tree of Light', which accords entirely with this same identification; and we can add another concordance drawn from the Islamic tradition, and which is no less remarkable. In the *Sūrat an-Nūr*,[11] a 'blessed tree' is mentioned, that is, a tree charged with spiritual influences,[12] that is 'neither of the East nor of the West', which clearly defines its position as central or axial;[13] and this is an olive tree of which the oil feeds the light of a lamp; this light symbolises the light of *Allāh*, which is really *Allāh* himself, for, as it is said at the beginning of the same verse, '*Allāh* is the Light of the heavens and of the earth'. It is obvious that if the tree is here an olive, it is because of the illuminating power of the oil which is drawn from it, and therefore because of the luminous and igneous nature inherent in it. Thus the reference is indeed here yet again to the 'Tree of Light'. On the other hand, in at least one of the Hindu texts that describe the inverted tree,[14] that tree is expressly identified with *Brahma*; if it is identified with *Agni* elsewhere, there is no contradiction, for in the Vedic tradition *Agni* is one of the names and aspects of *Brahma*. In the Qur'anic text, it is *Allāh* under the aspect of Light who illumines all the worlds;[15] it would indeed be difficult to push the parallelism further, and we have in this one of the most striking examples of the unanimous agreement of all the traditions.

10. It may be noted that this 'column of fire' and this 'column of smoke' are precisely the same as those that alternately guided the Hebrews during their exodus from Egypt (Exodus 14), and which moreover were a manifestation of the *Shekinah* or Divine Presence.

11. *Qur'ān* 24: 35.

12. In the Hebrew Kabbala these same spiritual influences are symbolised by the 'dew of Light' which emanates from the Tree of Life.

13. Likewise, and in the most literally 'geographical' sense, the Pole is situated neither to the East nor to the West.

14. *Maitri Upanishad* 6: 4.

15. According to what follows in the text, this Light is 'light upon light', therefore a double light, superposed, which evokes the superposition of the two trees of which we spoke above. Again one finds there 'one essence', that of a single Light, and 'two natures', that above and that below; or the unmanifested and the manifested, to which correspond respectively the light hidden in the nature of the tree and the visible light in the flame of the lamp, the first being the essential support of the second. [The entire verse in question (24: 35) is: '*Allāh* is the Light of the heavens and the earth. His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining planet. This lamp is kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil well nigh blazeth in splendour though no fire have touched it. Light upon light, *Allāh* guideth unto His light whom He will. And *Allāh* speaketh to mankind in allegories, and *Allāh* is Knower of all things'. Tr.]

54 § The Tree and the Vajra

IN the last chapter there was a reference to the schema of the tree with three branches and three roots, which is based on the general symbol of analogy and can thus be looked at in the two opposite directions. We will add to this some complementary remarks which will make clearer the close connection between apparently different symbols of the World Axis. In fact, as it is easy to see from the figure below, the schema in question is fundamentally identical with the figure of the double *vajra*, the two opposite extremities of which likewise

Figure 18

reproduce the analogical symbolism in question. Already, with reference to the *vajra*, we have pointed out this correspondence in connection with the triplicity that is often to be found in axial symbolism in order to represent simultaneously the central axis itself and the two accompanying cosmic currents of the right and of the left, a triplicity of which certain representations of the World Tree provide an example. We remarked that 'in this case, the double triplicity of the branches and roots recalls even more exactly that of the two extremities of the *vajra*' which, as is known, are in the form of a trident or *trishula*.[1]

It could nevertheless be asked if the comparison thus established between two such seemingly different things as the tree and the symbol of the thunderbolt admits of being carried further than the single fact of this axial significance, which is obviously common to both. The answer to this question is to be found in what has been said about the igneous nature of the World Tree, with which *Agni* himself, as *Vanaspati*, is identified in Vedic symbolism, and of which the 'column of fire' is consequently an exact equivalent as representation of the axis. It is likewise obvious that lightning is of an igneous or luminous nature; moreover, lightning is one of the most common symbols of 'illumination', understood in the intellectual or spiritual sense. The 'Tree of Light', of which we have spoken, traverses and illumines all the worlds; according to the *Zohar* passage cited in this connection by Ananda Coomaraswamy, 'the illumination begins at the summit and extends in a straight line through the entire trunk'; and this propagation of light can easily evoke the idea of lightning; generally speaking, the World Axis is always regarded more or less explicitly as luminous. We have already had occasion to recall that

1. 'Symbolic Weapons' [28 above]. For figures of the *vajra* see A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*.

Plato, for example, described it as a 'luminous axis of diamond', and this is yet another direct link with one of the aspects of the *vajra*, which means both 'thunderbolt' and 'diamond'.[2]

There is still something else to be said: one of the most widespread designations of the axial tree, in the different traditions, is that of 'Tree of Life'. Now, it is known that the traditional doctrines establish an immediate relationship between Light and Life;[3] we will not dwell further on this at present, having already treated this question elsewhere;[4] we will only recall once again, as relating immediately to our subject, the fact that the Hebrew Kabbala unites the two notions in the symbolism of the 'dew of light' emanating from the 'Tree of Life'. Furthermore, in other passages of the *Zohar* that Coomaraswamy cites in the course of his study on 'The Inverted Tree',[5] where there is question of two trees, a higher one and a lower one, therefore as it were superposed, these two trees are respectively designated as the 'Tree of Life' and the 'Tree of Death'. This recalls the two symbolic trees of the Earthly Paradise, and is moreover particularly significant for the completion of the correspondence that we now have in mind, for these meanings of 'life' and 'death' are in fact also attached to the double aspect of the thunderbolt, represented by the two contrary directions of the *vajra*, as we have previously explained.[6] As we said then, what is really involved, in the most general sense, is the double power of production and destruction of which life and death are the expression in our world, and which is related to the two phases of 'expiration' and 'inhalation' of universal manifestation. The correspondence of these two phases is clearly indicated also in texts of the *Zohar* to which we have just alluded, for there the two trees are represented as mounting up and descending, each as it were taking the place of the other in a way analogous to the alternation of day and night.

55 § The Tree of Life and the Draught of Immortality

IN speaking of the 'World Tree' and its many representations, we have made special mention of the *Haoma* tree of the Zoroastrian tradition. This tree (more

2. In this connection, we have also drawn a parallel with the Buddhist symbolism of the 'diamond Throne' situated at the foot of the axial tree. In all of this, the diamond must be considered on the one hand for its luminosity and on the other for its indivisibility and inalterability, which is the image of the essential immutability of the axis.

3. [Cf., John 1: 4: 'In him was life; and the life was the light of men'. Tr.]

4. 'Verbum, Lux et Vita' [in *Aperçus sur l'initiation*, ch. 48]

5. [See *Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society*, XXIX, 1938, Bangalore; and in *Coomaraswamy: Selected Papers*, 1, 1977. Tr.]

6. See above 'Symbolic Weapons' [28] and also 'Thunderbolts' [27].

precisely the white *Haoma*, a paradisal tree, since the other, the yellow *Haoma*, is only a later substitute) is related particularly to the 'Tree of Life' aspect of the 'World Tree', for the liquor that is extracted from it and which is also called *haoma*, is the same as the Vedic *soma* which is identical with the *amrita* or 'draught of immortality'. Even if *soma* should be described as the extract of an ordinary plant rather than of a tree, this is no valid objection against its mention in the context of the symbolism of the World Tree. In fact, the World Tree is designated by many names, and besides those which refer to trees in the strict sense, we find the name of the plant *oshadi* and even that of the reed (*vetasa*).[1]

If we refer to the Biblical symbolism of the Earthly Paradise, the only notable difference in this respect is that immortality is given, not by the liquor drawn from the Tree of Life, but by its very fruit, so that here it is a question of a 'food of immortality' rather than a draught;[2] but it is in any case always a product of the tree or of the plant, a product that contains the concentrated sap which is in a way the very essence of the plant.[3] It is likewise to be noted on the other hand that of all the vegetal symbolism of the Earthly Paradise, the Tree of Life alone subsists as such in the Celestial Jerusalem, whereas all the rest of the symbolism is mineral. This Tree then bears twelve fruits which are the twelve 'Suns', that is, the equivalent of the twelve *Ādityas* of the Hindu tradition, the Tree itself being their common nature, to the unity of which they finally return.[4] This recalls what we have said about the Tree as 'station of the Sun', and about the symbols representing the Sun coming to rest on the Tree at the end of the cycle. The *Ādityas* are the sons of *Aditi*, and the idea of indivisibility which this name expresses obviously implies 'indissolubility' and therefore 'immortality'. *Aditi*, furthermore, is not unrelated in certain respects to the 'vegetative essence' by the fact that she is considered to be the 'goddess of the earth'[5] while being also the 'mother of the *Devas*'; and the opposition of *Aditi* and *Diti*, from which that of the *Dēvas* and *Asuras* proceeds, in this respect may be linked to that of the Tree of Life and the Tree of Death of which we spoke in the last chapter. This opposition is to be found, moreover, in the very symbolism of the sun, which is identified with Death (*Mrityu*) as regards the aspect under which it is turned towards the 'world below',[6] while at the same time it is the 'gate of immortality', so that it could be said that the sun's other face, that which is

1. Cf., A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'The Inverted Tree', p. 12 [in *Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society*, XXIX, 1938, Bangalore; also in *Coomaraswamy: Selected Papers, I*, 1977.]

2. Among the Greeks, 'ambrosia', inasmuch as it was distinguished from 'nectar', is also a food, even though its name may be etymologically identical with that of *amrita*.

3. In Sanskrit, the word *rasa* has both the meaning of 'sap' and 'essence'.

4. Cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 4 and 11; one can also refer to what we said there about the draught of immortality and of the different traditional 'substitutes' (*ibid.* ch. 5 and 6).

5. Cf., A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'The Inverted Tree', p. 28.

6. In this connection, considerations could also be developed from the relationship of the sun and its revolutions with time (*Kāla*) which devours manifested beings.

turned towards the 'extra-cosmic' domain, is identical with immortality itself. This last remark brings us back to what we said earlier about the Earthly Paradise, which in fact is still a part of the cosmos, though its position is none the less virtually 'supra-cosmic'. This explains why the fruit of the 'Tree of Life' can be attained there, which amounts to saying that the being who has reached the centre of our world (or of any other state of existence) has thereby already won immortality; and what is true of the Earthly Paradise is naturally true also of the Celestial Jerusalem, for both the one and the other are in the final analysis two complementary aspects assumed by one and the same reality according to whether it is seen in relation to the beginning or the end of a cosmic cycle.

It goes without saying that all these considerations must be related to the fact that, in the different traditions, vegetable symbols appear as the 'pledge of resurrection and of immortality': the 'golden bough' of the ancient Mysteries; the acacia which replaces it in the Masonic initiation, as well as the boughs or palms in the Christian tradition; and also the part generally played, in symbolism, of evergreen trees and those that produce incorruptible gums or resins.[7] Nor could it be objected that in the Hindu tradition plants are sometimes considered as being 'asuric' in nature; in fact, the growth of the plant is in part aerial, but also in part subterranean, which implies a kind of double nature, again corresponding in a certain sense to the 'Tree of Life' and the 'Tree of Death'. Moreover, it is the root, that is, the subterranean part, that constitutes the original 'support' of the aerial vegetation, which corresponds to the 'priority' in nature of the *Asuras* in relation to the *Devas*. Nor indeed is it without reason that the fight between the *Devas* and *Asuras* is represented as being chiefly concerned with the possession of the 'draught of immortality'.

A consequence that is very important from the particular perspective of the traditional sciences results from the close relationship of the 'draught of immortality' with the 'Tree of Life': it is that the 'elixir of life' relates especially to what can be called the 'vegetal' aspect of alchemy,[8] where its place is analogous to that of the 'philosopher's stone' in alchemy's mineral aspect. In short, it could be said that the 'elixir' is the 'vegetal essence' *par excellence*. The use of such an expression as 'golden liquor' must not be raised in objection, for like the 'golden bough' it really alludes to the 'solar' quality of what is thus described. It is obvious that this quality must have its expression in the vegetal order as well as in the mineral; and in this connection, we again recall the representation of the sun as 'fruit of the Tree of Life', a fruit which, furthermore, is also expressly designated as a 'golden apple'. Once we view these things in their principle, it goes without saying that vegetal and mineral objects must be seen symbolically, by which we mean that it is a

7. Cf., *L'Esotérisme de Dante*, ch. 5; and *The Lord of the World*, ch. 4.

8. This aspect has been developed especially in the Taoist tradition, more explicitly than anywhere else.

question above all of their 'correspondences', or of what they respectively represent in the cosmic order, without this in any way preventing them from being taken in a literal sense when it comes to some of their more particular applications. This brings us once again to the already mentioned opposition that has to do with the double nature of plants: it is thus that vegetal alchemy, in its medical application, has its 'reverse' (if such an expression be allowed) in the 'science of poisons'. Moreover, and precisely in virtue of this opposition, all that is a remedy in one aspect is at the same time 'poison' in a contrary aspect.[9] Naturally, we cannot think of developing here all that could be drawn from this last remark; but it will allow at least a glimpse of the precise applications that are possible, in a domain such as traditional medicine, for a symbolism so intrinsically 'principial' as that of the 'Tree of Life' and the 'Tree of Death'.

56 § The Symbolism of the Ladder

THERE has already been mention, in a previous chapter,[1] of the symbolism, preserved among the Indians of North America, in which the different worlds are represented by a series of superposed caves, and creatures pass from one world to another by climbing a central tree. Diverse instances are also to be found of similar symbolism realised by rites in which the climbing of a tree represents the ascension of the being along the 'axis'. Such rites are Vedic as well as Shamanist, and their wide-spread diffusion is itself an indication of their truly 'primordial' character.

The tree can be replaced in such a context by some other axial symbols; the mast of a vessel is one example, and it is to be noted in this connection that, from the traditional point of view, the construction of a ship, just as that of a house or a chariot, is the realisation of a 'cosmic model'. It is also interesting to note that the 'crow's nest' which encircles the upper part of the mast has here strictly the same symbolic place as the 'eye' of the dome, which the axis, even when it is not materially represented, is deemed to pass through at its very centre. On the other hand, lovers of 'folklore' will be able to point out that the common 'greased pole' of travelling shows is itself nothing other than a no longer understood vestige of a rite similar to those of which we have just spoken. In this case also, a particularly significant detail is to be found in the ring which is suspended from the top of the pole and which has to be reached by climbing—a ring through which the pole passes and beyond which it extends, just as the mast of a vessel passes beyond the crow's

9. In Sanskrit, the word *visha*, 'poison' or 'draught of death', is considered as the antithesis of *amrita*, or 'draught of immortality'.

1. [Cf., 43, 'The Narrow Gate', above.]

nest and the spire of the *stupa* rises beyond the dome. The ring is yet another obvious representation of 'eye of the sun', and it will be agreed that it is certainly not the 'popular soul' which could have invented such a symbolism.

Another very widely spread symbol, and one which is linked to the same order of ideas, is that of the ladder, which is likewise an axial symbol. As Coomaraswamy said,[2] '... the Axis of the Universe is, as it were, a ladder on which there is a perpetual going up and down'. To make possible the accomplishment of such movement is, in fact, the essential purpose of the ladder; and since, as we have just seen, the tree and the mast play the same part, it can indeed be said that in this respect the ladder is their equivalent. On the other hand, the specific form of the ladder calls for some comments. Its two vertical uprights correspond to the duality of the 'Tree of Knowledge' or, in the Hebrew Kabbala, to the two 'columns', right and left, of the Sephirothic tree. Thus, neither the one nor the other is strictly axial; and the 'column of the middle', which is truly the axis, is not itself represented (just as in those cases where the central pillar of a building is not materially represented). But in another respect, the whole ladder, in its entirety, is in a way 'unified' by the rungs which join the two uprights to one another, and which, being placed horizontally between them, necessarily have their centres situated on the axis.[3] The ladder thus puts before us a very complete symbolism: it can be likened to a vertical bridge rising throughout the worlds and making it possible to traverse their whole hierarchy by passing from rung to rung; and at the same time the rungs are the worlds themselves, that is, the different levels or degrees of universal Existence.[4]

This meaning is obvious in the Biblical symbolism of Jacob's ladder, along which angels ascend and descend; and Jacob set up a stone which, at the place where he had the vision of the ladder, he 'erected like a pillar' which is also a figure of the World Axis and which in a way thus takes the place of the ladder itself.[5] The angels strictly speaking represent the higher states of the being; it is thus to these states that the rungs more particularly correspond, as follows from the fact that the ladder must be considered as having its feet resting on the earth, which means that, for us, it is necessarily our world itself which is the 'support' from which all ascension must be made. Even if it should be supposed that the

2. 'The Inverted Tree' p. 20. [Guénon refers to the article as it appeared in the *Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society*, XXIX, 1938, Bangalore; it can also be found, as noted in several preceeding notes, in *Coomaraswamy: Selected Papers, I*; this particular citation is on p. 390.]

3. In early Christian Hermetism an equivalent in this respect is to be found in one of the symbolic interpretations of the letter H with its two vertical strokes and the horizontal line which joins them.

4. The symbolism of the bridge in its various aspects could naturally give rise to many other considerations [see below, 65 and 66]; the Islamic symbolism of the 'guarded table' (*al-lawḥu l-maḥfūẓ*) could also be regarded as having certain parallels with this, as being the 'supra-temporal' prototype of the sacred Scriptures which, from the highest heavens, descend vertically, traversing all the worlds.

5. Cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 9.

ladder extends beneath the earth, in order to comprise the totality of the worlds (as must be the case in reality), its lower portion would in any case be invisible, just as for beings who have reached a 'cave' at a given level, the portion of the central tree beneath them is out of sight. In other words, since the lower rungs have already been traversed, there is no longer any need actually to consider them as regards the subsequent realisation of the being, who has only now to traverse the upper rungs.

This is why, especially when the ladder is used as an element of certain initiatic rites, its rungs are expressly considered as representing the different heavens, that is, the higher states of the being. It is thus that in the Mithraic mysteries the ladder had seven rungs which were related to the seven planets and which, it is said, were made of metals corresponding respectively to them. The traversal of these rungs represented the passage through so many initiatic grades. This ladder of seven rungs is found in certain initiatic organisations of the Middle Ages from which it doubtless passed more or less directly into the higher grades of Scottish Masonry, as we said elsewhere in connection with Dante.[6] In this case, the rungs are related to so many sciences, but that makes no fundamental difference, for according to Dante himself, these sciences are identified with the heavens.[7] It goes without saying that in order to correspond thus to higher states and to degrees of initiation, these sciences could only be traditional sciences understood in the deepest and most strictly esoteric sense; and that is so even for those of them whose names no longer denote, for modern man, anything but profane sciences or arts—in a word, something which by comparison with these genuine sciences is really no more than an empty shell and a lifeless residue—all this being the result of the degeneration we have so often alluded to.

In some cases the symbol of a double ladder is to be found, implying that the ascent has to be followed by a re-descent. The ascent is made on one side by the rungs which are the 'sciences', that is, the degrees of knowledge corresponding to the realisation of the same number of states; and the re-descent is made on the other side by the rungs which are the 'virtues', that is, the fruits of these same degrees of knowledge applied to their respective levels.[8] It may be noted furthermore that even in the case of the single ladder, one of the uprights can also be considered in a certain sense as 'ascending', and the other as 'descending', according to the general meaning of the two cosmic currents of right and left to which these two uprights also correspond by the very reason of their lateral situation with regard to the true axis which, though invisible, is none the less the principal element of the symbol, that to which all its parts must be related if its meaning is to be understood completely.

6. Cf., *L'Esotérisme de Dante*, ch. 2 and 3.

7. *Convivio* 2: 14.

8. It must be said that this correspondence of the ascent and of the re-descent sometimes seems to be inverted. But this may derive simply from some alteration of the primitive meaning, as often happens in the more or less confused and incomplete state in which these Western initiatic rituals have come down to the present.

In conclusion let us consider a somewhat different symbolism also to be found in certain initiatic rituals, namely the ascent of a spiral staircase. In this instance, it could be said that the ascent is less direct, for instead of being accomplished vertically along the direction of the axis itself, it follows the turns of the spiral that is coiled around this axis, so that its progress appears rather as 'peripheral' than as 'central'; but essentially, the final result must nevertheless be the same, for it is always a question of an ascent through the hierarchy of the states of the being. Like the rungs of the ladder, the successive turns of the spiral are, as we have amply explained before,[9] an exact representation of the degrees of universal Existence.

57 § The Eye of the Needle

As we said previously, one of the representations of the symbol of the 'narrow gate' is the 'eye of the needle' which is mentioned with this meaning in a well-known Gospel text.[1] The English expression *needle's eye* is particularly significant in this respect, for it links this symbol all the more directly to some of its equivalents, such as the 'eye' of the dome in architectural symbolism; these are diverse representations of the 'solar gate' which itself is also designated as the 'Eye of the World'. It will also be noted that the needle, when placed upright, may be taken as a representation of the World Axis; and in this case, the perforated extremity being at the top, there is an exact coincidence between this position of the 'eye' of the needle and the 'eye' of the dome.

The same symbol has yet other interesting connections which have been pointed out by Coomaraswamy:[2] in a *Jātaka* tale dealing with a miraculous needle (which, moreover, is really identical with the *vajra*), the eye of the needle is designated in Pali by the word *pāsa*.[3] This word is the same as the Sanskrit word *pāsha* which originally had the meaning of 'knot' or 'loop'. This seems first of all to indicate, as Coomaraswamy observed, that in a very remote epoch needles were not perforated as they were later, but simply bent over at one end so as to form a kind of loop through which the thread was passed; but what is more important for us to consider is the relationship that exists between this application of the word *pāsha* to the eye of the needle and its other more common meanings which are also derived from the initial idea of 'knot'.

9. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*.

1. Matthew 19: 24.

2. 'Some Pali Words', pp. 166–67 [published originally in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, IV, 1939; republished in *Coomaraswamy: Selected Papers, 2*. Bollingen Series LXXXIX, Princeton University Press, 1977; the word *pāśa* is treated on pp. 308–9. Tr.].

3. *Jātaka*, 3, 282: *pāse vijjhiwā*, 'pierced with a hole' or with an 'eye'.

In Hindu symbolism, the *pāsha* is in fact most often a 'running knot' or 'lasso' used to capture animals in hunting. In this form, it is one of the chief emblems of *Mrityu* or *Yama*, and likewise of *Varuna*; and the 'animals' that they take by means of this *pāsha* are in reality all the living beings (*pāshu*). Hence also the meaning of 'bond': the animal, once it is taken, finds itself tied by the running knot which tightens around him; similarly, the living being is bound by the limiting conditions which hold it in its particular state of manifested existence. In order to come out of this state of *pāshu* it is necessary that the being be set free from these conditions, that is to say, in symbolic terms, that he escape from the *pāshu*, or that he pass through the running knot without its tightening about him. This is the same thing as to say that the being passes through the jaws of Death without them closing upon him,[4] exactly as the 'threading of the needle' represents the passage through that same 'solar gateway' in the symbolism of embroidery. We will add that the thread passing through the needle's eye has its equivalent in another symbolism, that of archery, in the arrow piercing the centre of the target; and that mark moreover used to be designated as the 'butt',[5] a term which is very significant in this respect, since the passage in question, by which the exit from the cosmos is achieved, is also the 'butt' that the being must attain in order to be 'delivered' finally from the bonds of manifested existence.

This last remark leads us to specify, with Coomaraswamy, that it is only as regards the 'last death', which immediately precedes deliverance and after which there is no return to a conditioned state, that the 'threading of the needle' truly represents the passage through the 'solar gateway'; for in every other case, there cannot yet be a question of an 'exit from the cosmos'. None the less, one may also speak analogically and in a relative sense of 'passing through the eye of the needle'[6] or of 'escaping the *pāsha*', in order to designate every passage from one state to another, such a passage always being a 'death' in relation to the antecedent state at the same time that it is a 'birth' into the subsequent state, as we have already explained on many occasions.

There is yet another important aspect of the symbolism of the *pāsha* of which we have not spoken hitherto: this is the aspect under which it relates more particularly to the 'vital knot',[7] and it remains for us to show that this, too, belongs strictly to the same order of considerations. In fact, the 'vital knot' represents the bond which holds together the different constitutive elements of the individuality. It is this bond, therefore, which keeps the being in his condition of *pāshu*; for when the bond is undone or broken, the

4. Cf., the representations of *Shinje*, the Tibetan form of *Yama*.

5. [Unlike the now obsolete English 'butt', the French *but* from which it comes is still current. Both words have the meaning of 'mark' and of 'goal'. Cf., 'Here is my journey's end, here is my butt'. *Othello*, v: ii, 267, Ed.]

6. Cf., Dante, *Purgatorio* 10: 16.

7. This symbol of the 'vital knot' in the rites of the guilds is represented by a cravat knotted in a special way; the equivalence with the running knot or the loop of the *pāsha* is obvious.

disaggregation of these elements follows, and this disaggregation is precisely the death of the individuality entailing the passage of the being to another state. In transposing this with respect to 'final deliverance', it can be said that when the being succeeds in passing through the loop of the *pāsha*, without it seizing and capturing him, it is as if the loop was undone for him—undone once and for all. In a word, these are only two different ways of expressing the same thing. We will not dwell further on this question of the 'vital knot', which could lead us to many other developments. We pointed out earlier[8] how, in architectural symbolism, it has its correspondence in the 'sensible point' of a building, inasmuch as a building is the image of a living being as well as of a world, accordingly as whether it is looked at from a microcosmic or macrocosmic point of view. But for the present, what we have said suffices to show that the 'solution' of this knot—which is also the 'Gordian knot' of the Greek legend—is again, fundamentally, an equivalent of the passage of the being through the 'Sun-door'.

58 § Traversing the Waters

ANANDA COOMARASWAMY has shown that in Buddhism as in Brahmanism, the 'Pilgrim's Way', represented as a voyage, can be related in three different ways to the symbolic river of life and death. The journey can be accomplished either by going upstream towards the source of the waters, or by crossing over the waters to the other shore, or by going downstream towards the sea.[1] As he quite rightly remarked, this use of different symbolisms, which are contrary only in appearance and really have the same spiritual significance, agrees with the very nature of metaphysics which is never systematic while being always perfectly coherent. Thus it is only necessary to make sure of the precise sense in which the symbol of the river, with its source, its banks, and its mouth, is to be understood in each case.

The first case, that of going upstream, is perhaps the most remarkable in certain respects; for the river must then be conceived as identical with the World Axis. This is the 'celestial river', which descends towards the earth and which, in the Hindu tradition, is designated by such names as *Ganga* and *Saraswatī*, which are strictly names of certain aspects of the *Shakti*. In the Hebrew Kabbala this 'river of life' finds its correspondence in the 'channels' of the Sephirothic tree by which the influences of the 'world above'

8. See the article 'Cologne ou Strasbourg?' in *Le Voile d'Isis*, January 1927 [and republished as chapter 1, vol I, of the posthumous collection of Guénon's studies, *Etudes sur la Franc-Maçonnerie et le Compagnonnage*, Paris, Editions Traditionnelles, 1964. Tr.]

1. Cf., the word *samudda* in 'Some Pali Words' [published originally in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, IV, 1939; republished in *Coomaraswamy: Selected Papers, 2*. Tr.]

are transmitted to the 'world below', and which are also directly related to the *Shekinah* which is a near equivalent of the *Shakti*; and there are also the waters which 'flow upwards', which is an expression of the return towards the celestial source, represented in this case not by the re-ascent of the current, but by the reversal of direction of the current itself. In any case, there is clearly a 'reversal' which, as Coomaraswamy remarks, was represented in the Vedic rites by the reversal of the sacrificial post, this post being yet another image of the World Axis; and we see immediately thereby that all this is closely linked to the symbolism of the 'inverted tree' of which we have already spoken.

It could be noted also that there is here both a resemblance and a difference with regard to the symbolism of the four rivers of the terrestrial Paradise. These flow horizontally on the surface of the earth and not vertically in the axial direction; but their source is at the foot of the Tree of Life which is itself the World Axis, and which is also the Sephirothic tree of the Kabbala. It can be said, therefore, that the celestial influences, descending by the Tree of Life and thus arriving at the centre of the terrestrial world, then spread out in this world along the four rivers; or else, replacing the Tree of Life with the 'celestial river', we can say that upon reaching the earth, the river is divided and flows forth according to the directions of space. In these conditions, the upstream movement can be considered as being achieved in two phases: the first, on the horizontal plane, leads to the centre of the world; the second, starting from this centre, is accomplished vertically along the axis, and it is with this in mind that the first phase is performed. Let us add that these two successive phases, from the initiatic point of view, have their correspondence in the respective domains of the Lesser Mysteries and the Greater Mysteries.

The second of these symbolisms, that of the crossing from one bank to the other, is doubtless more common and more generally known. The 'crossing of the bridge' (which also may be the crossing of a ford) is found in nearly all traditions and more particularly in certain initiatic rituals as well.[2] The crossing may likewise be made on a raft or in a boat, which then is linked with the very widespread symbolism of navigation.[3] The river that must be crossed is more specifically the 'river of death'; the shore which is left behind is the world subject to change, that is, the domain of manifested existence (most often considered in its human and corporeal state in particular, as it is from this state that we must actually set forth), and the 'other shore' is *Nirvāna*, the state of the being which is definitively set free from death.

2. Whence the symbolic signification of words such as *Pontifex* and *Tirthankara*, of which we have spoken elsewhere. Hence, also, in Sanskrit, diverse terms etymologically containing the idea of 'traversing', including *Avatāra* which literally expresses a 'downward crossing' (*avatarana*), that is to say, the 'descent' of a Saviour.

3. Coomaraswamy points out in this connection that the symbol of the saving boat (in Sanskrit, *nava*, in Latin *navis*) is found in the designation of the 'nave' of a church. This boat is an attribute of St Peter, after having been an attribute of Janus, just as were the keys, as we have explained elsewhere.

Finally, for the third case, that of the 'descent with the current', the Ocean[4] must then be considered not as an extent of water to be crossed but, on the contrary, as the very goal to be reached and therefore as representing *Nirvāna*. The symbolism of the two shores is thus different from the one just mentioned, and here there is even an instance of the double meaning of symbols; for it is not a question of passing from one bank to the other but, indeed, of avoiding both of them. They are, respectively, the 'world of men' and the 'world of the gods' or, again, the 'microcosmic condition' (*adhyātma*) and the 'macrocosmic condition' (*adhidevata*). There are also other dangers in the current itself that must be avoided in order to reach the goal. These are symbolised especially by the crocodile which stands 'against the current', which implies that the voyage is in the direction of the current. This crocodile, with open jaws, and from which one must escape, represents Death (*Mrityu*) and as such is the 'guardian of the Gateway', which is then represented by the mouth of the river (which, more precisely, as Coomaraswamy says, should be considered as the 'mouth' of the sea into which the river flows). We thus have yet another symbol of the 'Gate' in addition to all those we have already had occasion to study.

59 § The Seven Rays and the Rainbow

We have already spoken, on different occasions, of the 'seven rays' of the sun.[1] It might be asked if these 'seven rays' do not have some connection with what are commonly called the 'seven colours of the rainbow', for these colours literally represent the different radiations of which solar light is composed. There is in fact a definite connection, but at the same time these so-called 'seven colours' are a typical example of the way in which an authentic traditional doctrine can sometimes be deformed by a general misunderstanding. This deformation, moreover, in a case like the present one, is easily explicable. It is clear that there must be a septenary here, but as one of its terms cannot be found, another is substituted which has no real justification; the septenary seems thus to be reconstituted, but it is restored in such a way that its symbolism is entirely falsified. If it is now asked why one of the members of the true septenary thus escapes the common man, the answer is also easy: it is because this term is the one that corresponds to the 'seventh ray', that is, to the 'central' or 'axial' ray which passes 'through the sun' and which, not being

4. *Samudra* (in Pali, *samudda*) is literally the 'gathering together of the waters', which recalls the words of Genesis 1: 9: 'Let the waters that are under the heavens be gathered together in one place'.

1. [See above, 43, 'The Narrow Gate', and 52, 'Symbols of Analogy'.]

a ray like the others, cannot be represented as they are.[2] By this very fact and by reason of the whole range of its symbolic and truly initiatic connections, it has a particularly mysterious character; and from this point of view it could be said that the substitution in question has the effect of veiling the mystery from the eyes of the profane. Nor in this context is it of any importance whether its origin was intentional or simply due to an involuntary misunderstanding, which doubtless would be rather difficult to determine exactly.[3]

In fact, the rainbow does not have seven colours, but only six. Suffice it to recall the most elementary notions of physics: there are three primary colours—blue, yellow, red; and there are three colours complementary to these, that is orange, violet, and green, six colours in all. Naturally there are also an indefinite number of intermediate shades between these colours, with a continuous and imperceptible transition from one to another; but obviously there is no valid reason whatsoever to add any one of these shades to the list of colours, for then one could just as well consider a multitude of them, and in such conditions the very limitation of colours to seven becomes fundamentally incomprehensible. We do not know whether any adversaries of symbolism have ever made this observation, but if so it would be indeed surprising if they had not taken advantage of it in order to qualify this number as 'arbitrary'. Indigo, which is habitually counted among the colours of the rainbow, is really nothing other than a mere shade between violet and blue;[4] and there is no more reason to count it as a distinct colour than there would be in the case of any other shade, such as bluish green for example, or a bluish yellow. Besides, the introduction of this shade into the enumeration of colours completely destroys the harmony of their distribution, which, if correctly

2. Referring to the beginning of the *Tao-te-King*, it could be said that each of the other rays is 'a way', but that the seventh is 'the Way'.

3. We have found a rather curious piece of information in this respect, though unfortunately without precise reference. The Emperor Julian [the 'Apostate'] refers somewhere to the 'seven rayed god' (*Heptaktis*), whose solar character is evident, as being, in the teaching of the Mysteries, a subject about which it was desirable to maintain the greatest reserve. If it were established that the erroneous notion of the 'seven colours' goes back to antiquity, it could then be asked if it had not been voluntarily spread by the initiates of these same Mysteries who would thus have found the means of assuring the preservation of a traditional doctrine without, however, making its true sense known externally. In the contrary case, it must be supposed that the substituted term was somehow invented by the common people themselves, who would have known simply of the existence of a septenary, but who would have been ignorant of its real constitution. It may be, moreover, that the truth lies in a combination of the two hypotheses; for it is very possible that current opinion on the 'seven colours' represents the outcome of several successive deformations of the initial doctrine.

4. The very designation 'indigo' is clearly quite modern, but it may be that it replaces some other older designation, or that this shade itself was at one time substituted for another in order to complete what was commonly understood to be the septenary of colours. To verify this it would naturally be necessary to undertake historical researches of a somewhat complicated kind, researches for which we neither have the time nor the necessary materials at our disposal; but for us, this point has only a very secondary importance, since what we have in mind is simply to show how the current conception expressed in the ordinary enumeration of the colours of the rainbow is erroneous and how it distorts the true traditional idea.

understood, will be seen to have the regularity of a geometric schema that is very simple and at the same time very significant from the symbolic point of view. In fact, the three primary colours can be placed at the three apexes of a triangle, and the three complementary colours at those of a second triangle inverted in relation to the first, in such a way that each primary colour and its complement are located at diametrically opposite points; and it is clear that the figure thus formed is none other than the 'Seal of Solomon'. If a circle is traced round the double triangle,[5] each of the complementary

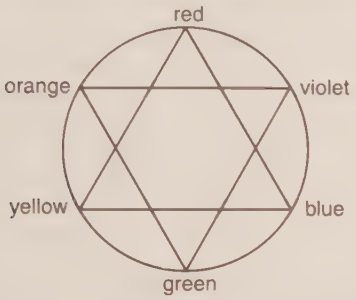


Figure 19

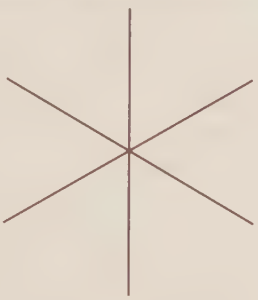


Figure 20

colours will be at the mid-point of the arc between the points occupied by the two primary colours it consists of (neither of these being, needless to say, its complement). The intermediary shades will naturally correspond to all the other points of the circumference,[6] but in the double triangle, which is the essential here, there is obviously room for only six colours.[7]

In order to resolve the question of the seventh term which must be added to the six colours in order to complete the septenary, we must go back to the geometrical representation of the 'seven rays' as we have explained it on another occasion, that is the six directions of space forming the three dimensional cross and the centre itself whence these directions issue.[8] It is

5. [See figure 18].

6. If we wished to count an intermediary colour between each of the six principal colours, as indigo between violet and blue, there would then be twelve colours in all and not seven; and if we wished to extend the distinction of shades further, it would always be necessary, for evident reasons of symmetry, to establish the same number of divisions in each of the intervals between two colours. In a word, this is no more than a very elementary application of the principle of logic and consequence.

7. We may note in passing that the fact that visible colours thus take up the entire circumference and meet again without any discontinuity, shows that they really form a complete cycle (violet participating both in the neighbouring blue and in red which is found at the other side of the rainbow) and that, consequently, the other non-visible solar radiations such as those which modern physics designates as 'infra-red' and 'ultra-violet' rays, in no way pertain to light and are of quite a different nature from it. Thus, there are not—as some seem to believe—'colours' which an imperfection of our visual organs prevents us from seeing, for there would be no room on any part of the circumference for these so-called colours, and it certainly could not be maintained that this circle is an imperfect figure or that it suffers from any discontinuity whatsoever.

8. [See figure 19].

important to note at the outset the close similarities this representation has with that of which we have just spoken regarding the colours. Like these, the six directions are opposed two by two, according to three straight lines which, extending on either side from the centre, correspond to the three dimensions of space; and if a plane representation is desired, it obviously cannot be shown except by the three diameters forming the six-spoked wheel (the general schema of the chrismon and various other equivalent symbols). Now these diameters are those which join the opposite apexes of the two triangles of the 'Seal of Solomon', so that the two representations really form only one.[9] It follows from this that the seventh term, in relation to the six colours, must play the same part as the centre does in relation to the six directions; and, in fact, it will also be placed at the centre of the schema, that is, at the point where the apparent oppositions (which are really only complementarities) are resolved into unity. This amounts to saying that this seventh term is no more a colour than the centre is a direction, but that, as the centre is the principle from which all space with the six directions proceeds, the seventh term must also be the principle from which the six colours are derived and in which they are synthetically contained. This can only be white, which is in fact 'colourless', just as the point is without 'dimension'. White does not appear in the rainbow anymore than the 'seventh ray' appears in geometrical figuration; but all colours are only the product of a differentiation of white light, just as the directions of space are only the development of possibilities contained in the primordial point.

The true septenary, therefore, is in this instance formed by the white light and the six colours into which it is differentiated; and it goes without saying that the seventh term is really the first, for it is the principle of all the others, which would have no existence whatsoever without it; but it is also the last in the sense that all finally return to it: the reunion of all the colours reconstitutes the white light, which gave birth to them. It could be said that in a septenary thus constituted, one is at the centre and six is at the circumference; in other words, such a septenary is formed of unity and of the senary, unity corresponding to the non-manifested principle and the senary to the whole of manifestation. We can compare this with the symbolism of the 'week' in the Hebrew Genesis, for, there too, the seventh term is essentially different from the six others. Creation, in fact, is the 'work of six days' and not of seven; and the seventh day is that of 'rest'. This seventh term, which could be designated as the 'sabbatical' term, is truly also the first; for this 'rest' is nothing other than the return of the creative Principle into the initial state of non-manifestation, a state moreover, from which it had gone forth only in appearance in relation to creation and to produce creation according to

9. Let us note also that an indefinite multitude of directions could be considered by interposing all the intermediate directions, which thus correspond to the intermediate shades between the six principal colours. But there is no need to consider distinctly any but the six 'oriented' directions which form the system of rectangular coordinates to which all space is referred and by which it is as it were 'measured' in its entirety. In this relationship, too, the correspondence between the six directions and the six colours is therefore perfectly exact.

the senary cycle, but from which in itself it had never really departed. Just as the point is not affected by the deployment of space, even though it seems to go out from itself to describe the six directions, and just as the white light remains unaffected by the irradiation of the rainbow, though it seems to be divided in order to form the six colours, so likewise the non-manifested Principle, without which manifestation could not exist in any manner whatsoever, even though it seems to act and to express itself in the 'work of six days', is nevertheless in no way affected by this manifestation; and the 'seventh ray' is the 'Way' by which the being, having passed through the cycle of manifestation, returns to the unmanifested and is fully united with the Principle from which, however, even in manifestation, it has never been separated except in illusory mode.

60 § *Janua Cœli*

In his important study, '*Svayāmatṛṇṇā: Janua Cœli*',[1] Ananda Coomaraswamy expounds the symbolism of the superstructure of the Vedic altar and, more particularly, of the three perforated bricks (*svayāmatṛṇṇā*) which constitute one of its essential parts. These bricks, which can also be stones (*sharkara*), in principle and according to their designation, ought to be perforated 'of themselves', that is to say, naturally, even though in practice this perforation may have been artificial at times. In any event, it is a question of three bricks or stones of annular shape which, superposed, correspond to the 'three worlds' (Earth, Atmosphere and Heaven), and which, with three other bricks representing the 'universal Lights' (*Agni*, *Vāyu* and *Āditya*), form the vertical Axis of the Universe. Furthermore, on ancient Indian coins (and similar representations are found on certain Babylonian seals) a representation of the 'three worlds' is to be found under the form of three rings linked together by a vertical line passing through their centres.[2] Of these superposed bricks, the lowest corresponds architecturally to the hearth (with which the altar itself is identified, both being the place of manifestation of *Agni* in the terrestrial world), and the highest corresponds to the 'eye' or the central opening of the dome;[3] they thus form, as Coomaraswamy observes, both a 'chimney' and

1. In *Zalmoxis*, II, 1939 [and republished in *Coomaraswamy: Selected Papers, 1*].

2. In Islamic architecture three globes one above the other, surmounted by a crescent, are very often placed at the summit of a minaret or of a *qubbah* (dome, or its Western pyramidal equivalent); these three globes likewise represent the three worlds, which are *ʿālam al-mulk*, *ʿālam al-malakūt* and *ʿālam al-jabarūt*, and the crescent that dominates them, symbol of the Divine Majesty (*al-Jalāl*), corresponds to the fourth world, *ʿālam al-ʿizzah* (which is 'extra-cosmic' and therefore beyond the 'gate' which is in question here). The vertical shaft which supports the whole is obviously identical to the mast of the *stupa* as well as to other axial symbols of which we have spoken on other occasions.

3. See 'The Narrow Gate' [43 above].

a 'way' (and the similarity of the two words in French, *cheminée* and *chemin*, is certainly not without significance even if, as is possible, they are not directly connected etymologically),[4] 'by which *Agni* proceeds and by which we must ourselves proceed towards Heaven'. Furthermore, inasmuch as they make possible the passage from one world to another, which is necessarily accomplished along the World Axis in the two opposite directions, they are the way by which the *Devas* ascend and descend through these worlds, using the three 'universal Lights' as so many rungs, in conformity with a symbolism of which the best known example is that of 'Jacob's Ladder'.[5] That which unites these worlds and is in a way common to them, though under different modalities, is the 'total Breath' (*sarvaprāna*) to which corresponds the central cavity of the superposed bricks;[6] it is also, according to another mode of expression which is basically equivalent, the *sūtrātmā* which, as we have already explained elsewhere, links all the states of the being with one another and with its total centre, generally symbolised by the sun, so that the *sūtrātmā* itself is then represented as a 'solar ray', and more precisely, as the 'seventh ray' which passes directly through the sun.[7]

It is actually to this passage 'through the Sun' that the symbolism of the upper brick more precisely refers, for as we have just said, it corresponds to the 'eye' of the dome or to the 'cosmic roof' (and it may be recalled in this connection that the sun is also designated as the 'Eye of the World'), that is, to the opening by which the exit from the Cosmos is accomplished (and, in fact, it cannot be accomplished except 'by the zenith'), whereas the Cosmos itself, with the diverse worlds it comprises, is represented by the entirety of the edifice in architectural symbolism. The correspondence in the human being with this upper opening is the *brahma-randhra*, that is, the orifice situated at the crown of the head, by which the subtle axial artery, the *sushumnā*, is in uninterrupted connection with the 'solar ray', also called *sushumnā*, which is nothing other than the *sūtrātmā* viewed in its particular relation with that being. Thus the highest brick can be further assimilated to the skull of the 'Cosmic Man', if an 'anthropomorphic' symbolism is adopted to represent the totality of the Cosmos. On the other hand, in zodiacal symbolism, this same opening corresponds to Capricorn, which is the 'gateway of the gods' and relates to the *deva-yāna*, in which is accomplished the passage 'beyond the Sun', while Cancer is the 'gateway of men' and relates to the *pitri-yāna*,

4. In this connection, Coomaraswamy points out the case of certain characters in 'folklore', such as St Nicholas and the diverse personifications of Christmas who are represented as descending and ascending by the chimney—which, in fact, is not unconnected with what is in question here.

5. See 'The Symbolism of the Ladder' [57 above].

6. This obviously relates to the general symbolism of respiration and to that of the 'vital breaths'.

7. All this symbolism must be understood simultaneously in a macrocosmic sense and in a microcosmic sense, since it applies both to the worlds taken all together as a whole, as one sees here, and to each of the beings which are manifested in these worlds. It is naturally by the heart, that is by the centre, that this connection of all things with the sun is established; and, of course, the heart itself corresponds to the sun and is its image in each particular being.

by which the being does not leave the Cosmos;[8] and it can be said also that, for the beings who pass through the one or the other, these two 'solstitial gates' correspond to the cases where the 'solar gateway' is respectively open or shut. As Coomaraswamy specifies, the two *yānas*, which are thus placed in relation with the two halves of the annual cycle, are connected with the north and the south insofar as the apparent movement of the sun is an ascent towards the north from Capricorn on the one hand and, on the other, a descent towards the south from Cancer.

It is therefore the sun, or what it represents in the principial order (for it goes without saying that it is the 'Spiritual Sun' that is really in question),[9] which, as the 'Eye of the World', is truly the 'gate of Heaven' or *Janua Cœli*, described also in such varied terms as a 'hole',[10] as a 'mouth',[11] and again as the hub of a chariot wheel; the axial meaning of this last symbol is obvious.[12] Nevertheless, there is room to make a distinction here, in order to avert what might, for some at least, cause confusion. On other occasions, in regard to the lunar symbolism of Janus (or, more exactly of *Janus-Jana*, identified with *Lunus-Luna*), we have in fact said that the moon is both *Janua Cœli* and *Janua Inferni*. In this case, instead of two halves of the annual cycle, ascending and descending, it is naturally necessary, in order to establish an analogous correspondence,[13] to consider the two halves, waxing and waning, of the lunation or monthly cycle. Now if the sun and the moon can both be regarded as *Janua Cœli*, this is because in the two cases heaven is not really taken in the same sense. Generally, in fact, this term can be used to designate everything referring to the supra-human states; but it is obvious that there is a great difference between those supra-human states which still belong to the Cosmos,[14] and that which, on the contrary, is beyond the Cosmos. As for the 'solar gateway', it is a question of Heaven in the supreme or 'extra-cosmic' sense; but as for the 'lunar gateway', it is a question only of *Svarga*, that is, of that one of the 'three worlds' which, even though the highest, is nevertheless included within the Cosmos as well as the two others. To return to the consideration of the uppermost of the three perforated bricks of the Vedic altar, it can be said that the 'solar gateway' is situated on its upper face (which is the true summit

8. See 'The Solstitial Gates' [37 above] and 'The Symbolism of the Zodiac among the Pythagoreans' [38 above].

9. Coomaraswamy often uses the expression *Supernal Sun* which seems to us impossible to translate exactly into French.

10. See 'The Eye of the Needle' [57 above].

11. We will return to this point more particularly [see the next chapter, '*Kāla-mukha*'].

12. The two wheels of the cosmic chariot, located at the two extremities of its axle (which is then the Axis of the Universe) are heaven and earth [see 'The Dome and the Wheel', 42 above]. It is naturally the 'celestial' wheel that is in question here.

13. We say analagous, but not equivalent, for even in the case of the *pitri-yāna*, one can never say that the sun is *Janua Inferni*.

14. These are strictly the states of supraformal manifestation. The Cosmos must be considered as comprising all manifestation, supraformal as well as formal, while that which is beyond the Cosmos is the unmanifested.

of the whole edifice), and the 'lunar gateway' on its lower face, as this brick itself represents *Svarga*. The lunar sphere is in fact described as touching the upper part of the atmosphere or of the intermediary world (*Antariksha*), which is here represented by the middle brick.[15] Thus, it can be said, in the language of the Hindu tradition, that the 'lunar gate' gives access to the *Indra-loka* (as *Indra* is the regent of *Svarga*); and the 'solar gate' to the *Brahma-loka*. In the traditions of Western antiquity, the *Indra-loka* corresponds to Elysium and the *Brahma-loka* to the Empyrean, the first being 'intra-cosmic' and the second 'extra-cosmic'; and we must add that it is the 'solar gate' alone which is strictly the 'narrow gate' of which we have previously spoken, the gate by which the being leaves the Cosmos, thereby definitively freed from the conditions of all manifested existence, and truly passes 'from death to immortality'.

61 § *Kāla-mukha*

In the course of the study referred to in the last chapter,[1] Coomaraswamy incidentally examines another symbol, the meaning of which relates to the *Janua Cœli*. This is a 'monster's head' which, in various forms, often more or less conventionalised, is to be found in the most widely different lands where it has received correspondingly diverse names, such as *Kāla-mukha* and *Kīrti-mukha* in India and *T'ao t'ieh* in China; it is likewise to be found not only in Cambodia and Java, but also even in Central America, nor is it alien to European art of the Middle Ages. What is important to note before all else is that this representation is generally placed on the lintel of a doorway or on the key of the vault of an arch (*torana*) containing the image of a divinity. In one way or another, it most often appears as linked to the idea of the door, which clearly determines its symbolic value.[2]

A number of explanations of this figure have been given (we are not,

15. This intermediary world along with the earth (*Bhūmi*) both belong to the human state, of which they constitute respectively the subtle and gross modalities. This is why, as Coomaraswamy quite rightly remarks in noting the correspondence of the Vedic symbolism of the perforated bricks with the ritual jades *pi* and *ts'ung* of the Chinese tradition (which represent respectively heaven and earth), the *pi*, which is a disc with pierced centre, corresponds to the upper brick, while the *ts'ung*, the form of which is that of a hollow cylinder and of a parallelepiped with a square base on the outside, must be considered as corresponding to the two other bricks taken together, the entire human domain thus being represented by a single object.

1. [See note 1 to the last chapter.]

2. Coomaraswamy gives the reproduction of a figure of *T'ao t'ieh* from the Han dynasty, from which a ring is as if suspended, and which can be regarded in some manner as the prototype of the common form of door-knockers in use up to our own times, that of an animal mask holding a ring in its mouth. Here this ring is itself a symbol of the 'narrow gate', as the open mouth of the monster is in other cases.

needless to say, speaking of those which see in it no more than a mere decorative motif), which may contain part of the truth, but which for the most part are insufficient, if only because they cannot be applied without distinction in every case. Thus, K. Marchal has remarked that, in the representations he has studied in greatest detail the lower jaw was almost always missing. Adding to this fact the round shape of the eyes[3] and the prominence of the teeth, he concludes that it must have been originally the image of a human skull.[4] The lower jaw, however, is not always absent, and it exists for example in the Chinese *T'ao t'ieh*, even though it there has quite a singular appearance, as if it were cut into two symmetrical parts that were folded back on each side of the head, which Carl Hentze explains as corresponding to the stretched hide of a flayed tiger or bear.[5] That may be accurate in this particular case, but it cannot hold in other instances, where the monster has a normally shaped mouth more or less widely open; and even as regards the *T'ao t'ieh*, this explanation has only an 'historical' value after all, and naturally in no way touches the symbolic interpretation.

The *T'ao t'ieh*, moreover, is really neither a tiger nor a bear, nor is it any other determinate animal, and Hentze describes the composite character of this fantastic mask thus: 'mouth of a carnivore armed with great fangs, horns of a buffalo or of a ram, face and tufts of an owl, wing stumps and claws of a bird of prey, frontal ornament in the form of a cicada'. This figure is very ancient in China, as it is found almost constantly in the bronzes of the Chang dynasty.[6] The common translation of the name *T'ao t'ieh*, 'glutton' or 'ogre', seems to have been given it only much later; but this appellation is no less exact, for it is indeed a question of a 'devouring' monster. This is also true for its equivalents belonging to other traditions which, even if they do not exhibit so composite a character as the *T'ao t'ieh*, in any case seem never to be reduced to the representation of a single animal. Thus, in India, it may be a lion (and there, conventionally, it is given the name of *Kāla* especially), or a *Makara* (symbol of *Varuna*, which should be kept in mind in view of the considerations which are to follow), or even an eagle, that is to say a *Garuda*; but under all these forms the essential meaning remains always the same.

As to this meaning, Hentze (in the cited article) sees in the *T'ao t'ieh* a 'demon of darkness'. This may be true in a certain sense, but on condition of being explained and made more precise, as he has himself done in a subsequent

3. In reality, this form is in a general way a characteristic of traditional representations of 'terrible' entities; thus the Hindu tradition attributes it to the *Yakshas* and other guardian spirits, as does the Islamic tradition to the *Jinn*.

4. 'The Head of the Monster in Khmer and Far Eastern Decoration' in *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 1948.

5. 'Le Culte de l'ours et du tigre et le "T'ao t'ie"', in *Zalmoxis*, I, 1938.

6. H. G. Creel, *Studies in Early Chinese Culture*. This author stresses particularly the elements of this representation borrowed from the ox and the ram, and he sees there a possible relationship with the fact that these animals were, during the Chang dynasty, those most often used in sacrifices.

work.[7] This was not at all a 'demon' in the ordinary sense of the word, but rather in the original sense of the Vedic *asura*, and the darkness in question is in reality the 'higher darkness';[8] in other words, it is a symbol of the 'Supreme Identy' insofar as it absorbs and sends forth by turns the 'Light of the World'. The *T'ao t'ieh* and other similar monsters thus correspond to *Vritra* and to his diverse equivalents, and also to *Varuna*, by whom the light or the rain is alternately retained or released, an alternation which is that of the involutive and evolutive cycles of universal manifestation.[9] Coomaraswamy has thus rightly said that this face, whatever its diverse appearances, is truly the 'Face of God' which both 'kills and vivifies'.[10] It is not, therefore, exactly a 'death's head', as Marchal would have it, at least insofar as it is not taken symbolically; it is rather, as Coomaraswamy goes on to say, the 'head of Death', that is to say of *Mrityu*, of whom *Kāla* is also a name.[11]

Kāla is strictly 'all-consuming Time';[12] but by transposition it also designates the very Principle itself insofar as it is 'destroyer', or rather 'transformer', in relation to manifestation which it reduces to the non-manifested state by reabsorbing it, as it were, into itself; this is the most exalted sense in which Death can be understood. It is also assimilated symbolically to the sun, and it is known furthermore that the lion, whose mask (*sinha-mukha*) it borrows, is more especially a solar symbol. This leads us back to what we explained previously on the subject of the *Janua Cœli*, and Coomaraswamy recalls in this connection that the Christ who said 'I am the Door', is at the same time the 'Lion of Judah' and the 'Sun of men'.[13] In Byzantine churches, the figure of the *Pancrator* or of Christ 'in majesty' occupies the central position of the vault, that is to say, that which corresponds precisely to the 'eye' of the dome. Now this, as we have explained elsewhere, represents, at the upper extremity of the World Axis, the gate by which the 'exit from the cosmos'[14] is made.

7. *Die Sakralbronzen und ihre Bedeutung in der frühchinesichen Kulturen*, Anvers, 1941. We do not have direct knowledge of this book, but we are indebted to Coomaraswamy for his indication concerning the sense in which the *T'ao t'ieh* is interpreted there.

8. See our study 'Les deux nuits' [ch. 31 in the author's *Initiation et Réalisation spirituelle*].

9. Light and rain are two symbols of celestial influences. We shall return to this concordance [see the following chapter, 'Light and Rain', below].

10. *Al-Muḥyī and al-Mumīt* are two divine names in the Islamic tradition.

11. Coomaraswamy calls attention to Indonesian sabre handles in this connection, handles on which devouring monsters are represented. Obviously, a symbol of Death is particularly appropriate here. On the other hand, a comparison also can be made with certain representations of *Shinje*, the Tibetan form of *Yama*, holding before him the 'wheel of existence' and apparently readying himself to devour all the beings represented there (see Marco Pallis, *Peaks and Lamas*, p. 146).

12. The primary meaning of this word is 'black', which brings us back again to the symbolism of 'darkness', which, moreover, even within manifestation, is applicable to every passage from one state to another.

13. The 'solar gate' (*surya-dvāra*) is the gate of Deliverance' (*mukti-dvāra*); the gate or door and the mouth (*mukha*) are equivalent symbols here. The sun, as 'Face of God', is likewise represented by a lion mask on a Christian sarcophagus at Ravenna.

14. See 'The Narrow Gate' [43 above].

To return to *Kāla*, an essentially solar significance also belongs to the composite representation known in Java under the name *Kāla-makara* in which the features of the lion are combined with those of the *Makara*, while at the same time, by its *Makara* aspect, it refers especially to the symbolism of *Varuna*. Insofar as *Varuna* is identified with *Mrityu* or with *Yama*,[15] the *Makara* is the crocodile (*shishumāra* or *shimshumārī*) with open jaws, which holds itself 'against the current' representing the one way by which every being must necessarily pass, and which is thus represented as the 'guardian of the gate' which the being must pass through in order to be liberated from the limitative conditions (symbolised also by the *pāsha* of *Varuna*) that keep him in the domain of contingent and manifested existence.[16] On the other hand, this same *Makara* is, in the Hindu Zodiac, the sign of Capricorn, that is, the 'gateway of the Gods'.[17] The *Makara* therefore, has two apparently opposed aspects, in a sense 'benefic' and 'malefic', which thus correspond to the duality of *Mitra* and *Varuna* (united in an indissoluble pair under the dual form *Mitrāvarunau*), or of the 'diurnal Sun' and the 'nocturnal Sun', which amounts to saying that, according to the state achieved by the being who presents himself before the *Makara*, his mouth is for this being either the 'Gate of Deliverance' or the 'jaws of Death'.[18] This last case is that of the ordinary man who, in passing through death, must come back to another state of manifestation, while the first case is that of the being who is 'qualified to pass through the middle of the Sun'[19] by means of the 'seventh ray' because he is already identified with the Sun itself, and to the question, 'who art thou?' which is asked of him when he comes before this gate, he is thus able to respond truly: 'I am Thou'.

62 § Light and Rain

In the last chapter we alluded to a certain relationship that exists between light and rain, inasmuch as both of them symbolise celestial or spiritual

15. See 'The Eye of the Needle' [57 above].

16. See 'Traversing the Waters' [58 above].

17. See 'Some Aspects of the Symbolism of the Fish' [24 above]. Instead of the 'devourer' aspect of the crocodile, the *Makara* is then invested with that of the dolphin 'saviour'.

18. In certain traditions the symbols of Love and of Death correspond to the duality *Mitrāvarunau*, as we have had occasion to note in connection with the *Fedeli d'Amore*. This same duality is also, in a certain sense, that of the 'two hemispheres' to which the symbolism of the Dioscuri, for example, refers. See 'The Double Spiral', ch. 5, *The Great Triad*. [It may be mentioned here that the *Makara*, vehicle of *Varuna*, is also associated with *Kāma-deva*, the god of love. Tr.]

19. *Jaiminīya Upanishad Brāhmana* I, 6, 1.

influences. This symbolism is obvious as far as light is concerned; as to rain, we have said as much for it elsewhere,[1] specifying that it is always a question of the descent of these influences into the terrestrial world, and pointing out that this is in reality the deeper meaning of the very widespread rites which have 'rain-making' as their purpose[2]—a meaning that is entirely independent of any 'magical' application. Furthermore, light and rain both have a 'vivifying' power that well represents the action of the influences in question.[3] The symbolism of dew, closely connected with that of rain by its very nature, is likewise related more especially to the giving of life; and this symbolism is common to numerous traditional forms—Hermetism,[4] the Hebrew Kabbala,[5] and to the Far Eastern tradition.[6]

It is important to note that light and rain, when they are considered from this point of view, are not only related to the heavens in a general way, but more especially to the sun; and this is strictly in conformity with the nature of the corresponding physical phenomena, that is, to light and rain themselves, understood in their literal sense. In fact, the sun is on the one hand the direct source of light in our world, and on the other hand it is also the sun which, causing the evaporation of water, draws it so to speak to the upper regions of the atmosphere whence it falls again as rain upon the earth. What must be further noted in this respect is that the action of the sun in its production of rain is due to its heat. We thus find the two complementary terms, light and heat, into which the igneous element is polarised, as we have said on other occasions; and this remark provides the explanation of the double meaning of a symbolic representation which seems to have been, in general, poorly understood.

In very different times and places and even into the Western Middle Ages, the sun has often been represented with two kinds of rays, straight and undulating by turns. A remarkable example of this depiction is to be found on an Assyrian tablet in the British Museum, (*figure* 20) dating from the ninth century before the Christian era,[7] where the sun appears as a kind of

1. *The Great Triad*, ch. 14.

2. This symbolism of rain has been preserved, through the Hebraic tradition, even in the Catholic liturgy itself: *Rorate, cœli, desuper, et nubes pluant Justum* (Isaiah 45: 8 [from the Introit for Wednesday in Ember Week of Advent, of the liturgy as it existed prior to Vatican II. Tr.]

3. As for light in this context, see *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapter 47.

4. The Rosicrucian tradition associates dew and light in a very special way, establishing a parallel by assonance between *Ros-Lux* and *Rosa-Crux*.

5. We will also recall in this connection that the name *Metatron*, by the different interpretations given it, is linked both to 'light' and to 'rain'; and the strictly solar character of *Metatron* puts this in direct relationship with the considerations that will follow.

6. See *The Lord of the World*, ch. 3, and *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 9.

7. Reproduced with permission of the British Museum.

Figure 21

star with eight rays.[8] Each of the four vertical and horizontal rays is constituted by two straight lines forming between them a very acute angle, and each of the four intermediary rays is made up of three undulating parallel lines. In other equivalent figurations the undulating rays are formed, as are the straight rays, by two lines meeting at their extremities, which then reproduce the well known aspect of the 'flaming sword'.[9] In all cases, it goes without saying that the essential elements to consider are, respectively, the straight line and the undulating line, to which the two kinds of rays can finally be reduced in the most simplified representations. But what exactly is the meaning of these two lines in this context?

First of all, according to the meaning which may seem the most natural when it is a question of a representation of the sun, the straight line represents light and the undulating line represents heat. Furthermore, this

8. This number 8 may have in this context a certain connection with the Christian symbolism of the *Sol Justitiæ* (cf., the symbolism of the eighth card of the Tarot). The solar God, before whom this representation is placed, furthermore holds in one of his hands 'a disc and a bar which are the conventional representations of the measuring line and of the rod of justice'. On the subject of the first of these two emblems, we will recall the relationship that exists between the symbolism of 'measurement' and that of the 'solar rays' (See *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 3).

9. We will point out incidentally that this undulating form is sometimes also a representation of lightning which is likewise related to rain insofar as this appears to be a result of the action of the thunderbolt on the clouds which frees the waters contained in them.

corresponds to the symbolism of the two Hebraic letters *resh* and *shin*, as respective elements of the roots *ar* and *ash* which express precisely these two complementary modalities of fire.[10] But what seems to complicate things, on the other hand, is the very general acceptance of the undulating line as a symbol of water; in this same Assyrian tablet, the waters are represented by a series of undulating lines just like those seen in the rays of the sun. The truth is that, as a consequence of what we have already explained, there is no contradiction here at all: the rain, to which the general symbol of water is naturally appropriate, can really be considered as proceeding from the sun; and besides, being an effect of solar heat, its representation can legitimately merge with that of the heat itself.[11] Thus, the double radiation which we were considering is indeed light and heat in a certain respect; but at the same time and in another respect it is also light and rain, by which the sun exercises its vivifying action on all things.

In connection with the same question, this should be noted: fire and water are two opposed elements, this opposition, moreover, being only the outward appearance of a complementarity; but beyond the domain where these oppositions are affirmed, they must, like all contraries, be joined and somehow united. In the principle itself, of which the sun is a sensible image, they are in a way identified, which justifies even more completely the representation that we have just been studying; and even at levels lower than that of the Principle but corresponding to states of manifestation higher than the corporeal world to which fire and water belong in their 'gross' aspect that gives rise to their opposition, there can still be between them an association equivalent, so to speak, to a relative identity. This is true for the 'upper waters', the possibilities of supraformal manifestation which, in a certain sense, are symbolically represented by the clouds whence the rain descends upon the earth,[12] and wherein at the same time there is fire in the form of lightning;[13] and it is still the same, in

10. See Fabre d'Olivet, *La Langue hébraïque restituée*.

11. In the language of the Far Eastern tradition, light being *yang*, heat considered as dark is *yin* in relation to it, just as water on the other hand is *yin* in relation to fire. The straight line here is therefore *yang*, and the undulating line *yin*, from both these two points of view.

12. Rain, in order to represent spiritual influences, must in fact be regarded as a 'celestial' water, and it is known that the Heavens correspond to the supraformal states. The evaporation of terrestrial waters by solar heat is, moreover, the image of a 'transformation', so that we have here as it were an alternating passage from the 'lower waters' to the 'upper waters' and vice versa.

13. This is to be compared with the remark we made above on the subject of lightning, and it completes the justification of the resemblance existing between its representation and the symbol of water. In the ancient Far Eastern symbolism, there is only a very slight difference between the representation of thunder (*lei-wen*) and that of clouds (*yun-wen*); both consist of series of spirals, sometimes rounded and sometimes square. The first are commonly said to be *yun-wen* and the second *lei-wen*, but intermediary forms exist which blunt this distinction in reality; and both are moreover likewise connected with the symbolism of the Dragon (cf., H. G. Creel, *Studies in Early Chinese Culture*, pp. 236–37). Let us also note that this representation of thunder by spirals further confirms what we have said elsewhere of the relation existing between the symbol of the double spiral and that of the *vajra* (*The Great Triad*, chapter 6).

the realm of formal manifestation, for certain possibilities pertaining to the subtle domain. It is particularly interesting to observe in this connection that the alchemists 'understand by the waters, the rays and the glimmer of their fire', and that they give the name 'ablution', not to the 'act of washing something with water or other liquor' but to a purification effected by fire, so that 'the ancients have hidden this ablution under the enigma of the salamander, said to live on fire, and under that of the incombustible flax,[14] which is there purified and whitened without being consumed'.[15] We can understand by this why so many allusions should be made in Hermetic symbolism to a 'fire that does not burn' and a 'water which does not wet the hands', and also why 'animated' mercury, that is, mercury vivified by the action of sulphur, should be described as an 'igneous water', and sometimes even as a 'liquid fire'.[16]

To return to the symbolism of the sun, we will only add that the two kinds of rays of which we have spoken are to be found in certain symbolic figurations of the heart, and the sun, or what it represents, is in fact considered as the 'Heart of the World', so much so that here also it is really a question of one and the same thing; but this, insofar as the heart appears simultaneously as a centre of light and of heat, will give rise to yet other considerations.[17]

63 § The Chain of the Worlds

IN the *Bhagavad Gītā* it is said: 'All this[1] is threaded on Me, as rows of pearls on a string'.[2] This is the symbolism of the *sūtrātmā* of which we have spoken on other occasions: it is *Ātmā* who, like a thread (*sūtra*), penetrates and joins together all the worlds, while at the same time being also the 'breath' which, according to other texts, sustains them and keeps them in existence, and without which they could not have the least reality nor exist in any way whatsoever. We speak here of the worlds, adopting the macrocosmic point of view; but it must be clearly understood that one could just as well consider the states of manifestation of a single being from the microcosmic perspective, and that the symbolism would be exactly the same in both of these applications.

Each world, or each state of existence, can be represented here by a sphere through which the thread passes diametrically in such a way as to form the

14. This 'incombustible flax' is really asbestos.
15. Dom A-J Pernéty, *Dictionnaire mytho-hermetique*, p. 2.
16. See *The Great Triad*, ch. 11.
17. [See 71 below, 'The Radiant Heart and the Flaming Heart'.]

1. *Sarvam idam*, 'this all', that is, the totality of manifestation, including all the worlds, and not only 'all that is in this world' as is stated in a translation published recently 'after Shri Aurobindo'.
2. *Bhagavad Gītā* VII: 7.

axis joining the two poles of this sphere. Thus, it can be seen that the axis of this world is, strictly speaking, only a portion of the axis of universal manifestation itself in its entirety, and it is in this way that the actual continuity of all states included in manifestation is established. Before going further in the examination of this symbolism, we must first dispel an unfortunate confusion relating to what, in such a representation, is to be considered as 'up' and 'down'. In the domain of physical appearances, if one starts from any point on the surface of a sphere, downwards is always the direction towards the centre of this sphere. It has however been noted that this direction does not stop at the centre, but continues down towards the opposite point on the surface of the sphere, then beyond the sphere itself; and some have thought that the descent itself could be said to continue in like manner, whence they have concluded that not only would there be a 'descent towards matter', that is to say, as regards our world, towards what is most gross in the corporeal order, but also a 'descent towards the spirit',[3] so that—if such a conception were admitted—the spirit itself would have a malefic aspect. In reality, things must be considered in a completely different way. In such a figuration, it is the centre that is the lowest point,[4] and beyond this one can only ascend again, as Dante reascended from Hell, continuing to follow the same direction by which his descent had first been accomplished, or at least what appears geometrically to be the same direction,[5] inasmuch as the mountain of the Earthly Paradise, according to its spatial symbolism, is at the antipodes of Jerusalem.[6] Besides, a moment's reflection is enough to show that otherwise the representation could not be coherent, for it would in no way agree with the symbolism of weight, the consideration of which is particularly important here. And how could that which is lowest for one point on the sphere at the same time be the highest for the point diametrically opposite to it? And how could these things have been visualised if on the contrary one had set out from this last point?[7] The only truth in all this confusion is that the stopping point of the descent is not situated in the corporeal order, for there are, in all reality, 'infra-corporeal'

3. Rev. V. Poucel, *La Parabole du Monde*, 3. The abuse too often made in our day of the words 'spirit' and 'spiritual' certainly plays a part in this misunderstanding; but this abuse ought rightly to have been exposed instead of being accepted, as it seems to have been with the erroneous consequences thus drawn from it.

4. It is on the contrary, the highest point when there is occasion to effect a kind of reversal of the figure in order to apply the 'inverse sense'—which, moreover, is that which corresponds to the true function of the centre as such.

5. We make this reservation because the very passage through the centre or the lowest point implies in reality a 'rectification' (represented with Dante by the way he passes around the body of Lucifer), that is, a change of direction; or still more precisely, a change in the 'qualitative' sense in which this direction is travelled.

6. See *L'Esotérisme de Dante*, ch. 8.

7. It is by a similar error, though one limited to the physical order and to the literal meaning, that the inhabitants of the antipodes have sometimes been represented with their heads downwards.

components in the prolongations of our world; but this 'infracorporeal' is the lower psychic domain which, far from being assimilable to anything spiritual whatsoever, is precisely what is furthest from all spirituality, to the point that it would appear to be its contrary in all respects, if indeed the spirit could be said to have a contrary. This confusion is nothing other than a particular case of the all too widespread confusion between the psychic and the spiritual.[8]

To what we have just said it could be objected that since the states of manifested existence are in hierarchy, some being higher than others, there must be also, on the very 'thread' which unites them, a direction going upwards and an opposite direction going downwards. This is true in a certain sense, but it must be added, first of all, that this distinction in no way affects the *sūtrātmā*, which is everywhere and always identical with itself, whatever the nature of the quality of the states which it penetrates and sustains. Secondly, this objection concerns the concatenation of the worlds and not each of these worlds taken by itself and considered in isolation from the others. In fact, any one of these worlds, in all its possible extension, is no more than an infinitesimal element in the totality of universal manifestation, so that in all rigour it could only be represented by a point. It would thus be possible to make use of the geometrical symbolism of the vertical and horizontal directions and to represent the worlds by an indefinite series of horizontal discs strung on a vertical axis.[9] This at least makes it clear that within the limits of each world, the axis can really be reached only at a single point, so that it is only outside these limits that there can be any question of an up and down, or a descending direction.

According to another symbolism which has already been mentioned, the axis in question can be assimilated to the 'seventh ray' of the sun. If a world is represented by a sphere, this axis could not then be any of the sphere's diameters, since as to the three diameters that form, at right angles to each other, the axes of a three-dimensional coordinate system, the six mutually opposed directions that they determine can only be the six other rays of the sun. The 'seventh ray' must be equally perpendicular to all of them, for it alone, as axis of universal manifestation, is what could be called the absolute vertical, in relation to which the axes of the coordinates of the world in

8. In this connection let us add that, contrary to what the author we have just cited has also said in the same passage, there can be no 'spiritual illusion'; the constant (and, it must be said, too often justified) fear that most mystics have of being deceived by the devil proves very clearly that they do not go beyond the psychic domain, for, as we have already explained elsewhere, the devil can have no direct grasp except on that domain (and indirectly thereby on the corporeal domain), and all that belongs to the spiritual order is, by its very nature, absolutely closed to him. [The above mentioned limitation to the psychic domain is moreover inevitable for the Lesser Mysteries which are concerned with the purification of the soul. But the rites are none the less in themselves a purely spiritual presence in that domain and therefore potentially an unfailing protection. In this connection see what is said of Hindu *mantra* and Islamic *dhikr* in 'The Language of the Birds', 9 above. Ed.]

9. This representation also shows clearly that since continuity is established only by the axis and by nothing else, communication between the different states can be actualised only through their respective centres.

question are all relatively horizontal. Obviously, this cannot be represented geometrically,[10] which shows that every representation is necessarily inadequate. In any event, the 'seventh ray' cannot really be represented except by a single point which coincides with the very centre of the sphere, so that for every being enclosed within the limits of a given world, that is, within the special conditions of a determined state of existence, the axis itself is in truth 'invisible', and the only thing that can be perceived of it is the point which is its 'trace' in that world. It goes without saying, moreover, that this last observation, which is necessary in order that the symbolism of the axis and of its relations with the worlds it links together might be understood as completely as possible, in no way prevents the 'chain of the worlds' being most commonly represented, as we mentioned at the outset, by a series of spheres[11] strung like the pearls of a necklace.[12]

What it is important to note also is that the 'chain' cannot in reality be traversed except in one direction, corresponding to what we have called the ascending direction of the axis. This is particularly clear when a temporal symbolism is used, assimilating the worlds or the states of existence to successive cycles, so that with respect to a given state the previous cycles represent lower states and the subsequent cycles the higher states, which implies that their series must be conceived as irreversible. Moreover, this irreversibility is also implicit in the conception of this same chain as having a strictly 'causal' character, even though such a concatenation essentially supposes simultaneity and not succession, for in a relation between cause and effect, the two terms can never be inverted; and basically, this notion of a causal series constitutes the true meaning of what is expressed symbolically by the appearances of a cyclic succession, the perspective of simultaneity always corresponding to a deeper order of reality than that of succession.

The 'chain of the worlds' is generally represented in a circular form,[13] for if each world is considered as a cycle and symbolised as such by a circular or spherical figure, manifestation in its entirety, that is, the totality of all the worlds, will itself appear as a kind of 'cycle of cycles'. Thus, not only can

10. Some might be tempted to intrude the 'fourth dimension' here, but this is itself not representable because it is really only an algebraic construction expressed in geometric language.

11. In certain cases these spheres are replaced by small rings perforated at their centre and which correspond to discs, considered as horizontal in relation to the axis of which we have just spoken.

12. It is moreover legitimate to conceive that such a necklace must itself have originally been nothing other than a symbol of the 'chain of the worlds'; for as we have often said, the fact of considering an object as merely decorative or ornamental is always the result of a certain degeneration which entails a failure to grasp the traditional point of view.

13. This circular form is in no way opposed to the 'verticality' of the axis or of the thread that depicts it; for as the thread is naturally considered to be of indefinite length, it can be assimilated, in each of its portions, to a straight line that is always vertical, that is, perpendicular to the domain of existence constituted by the world it traverses, a domain which, as we have already said, is only an infinitesimal element of manifestation, which necessarily comprises an indefinite multitude of such worlds.

the chain be transited continuously from beginning to end, but then it can be traversed again, always in the same direction, which in the deployment of manifestation corresponds to a level other than that wherein the simple passage from one world to another is situated;[14] and since this traversal can be made indefinitely, the very indefinity of manifestation itself is thereby expressed all the more clearly. It is essential to add, however, that if the chain is closed,[15] the very point at which it closes is in no way comparable to its other points, for it does not belong to the series of manifested states. The beginning and the end meet and coincide, or rather they are one and the same thing in reality, but this can only be so because they are situated not at just any level of manifestation but beyond it and in the Principle itself.[16]

In the different traditional forms the most common symbol of the 'chain of the worlds' is the rosary; and with regard to this we will say first of all, in connection with what we said at the outset about the 'breath' which sustains the worlds, that the formula pronounced on each bead corresponds, at least in principle if not always in fact, to one respiration, the two phases of which, the out-breath and the in-breath, symbolise respectively the production of a world and its reabsorption. The interval between two respirations naturally corresponds to the passage from one bead to another, as well as to an instant of silence, and it thus represents a *pralaya*. The general sense of this symbolism is, therefore, clear enough, whatever may be the particular forms in which it may be clothed as the case may have it. It must be noted also that the most essential element is, in reality, the thread which links the beads to each other; this may seem perfectly obvious as there can be no rosary if there is not first this thread on which the beads are then strung, 'as the pearls on a necklace'. If, however, it is necessary to draw attention to this, it is because from an outward point of view, it is the beads that are seen rather than the thread; and this itself is also very significant, as it is the beads that represent manifestation, while the *sūtrātmā*, represented by the thread, is itself unmanifested.

In India, the rosary is called *aksha-mālā*, or 'garland of *akshas*' (and also *aksha-sūtra*). But what exactly must be understood by *aksha*? This question

14. In terms of the Hindu tradition, this passage from one world to another is a *pralaya*, and the passage through the point where the extremities of the chain meet is a *mahapralaya*; moreover, this could be applied analogically to a more specified degree if, instead of considering the worlds in relation to the totality of manifestation, we consider only the different modalities of a certain world in relation to the integrality of that same world.

15. Perhaps it would be more exact in one sense to say that it *seems* to close, in order to avoid the supposition that a new traversal of this chain might be only a kind of repetition of the previous one, which is an impossibility. But in another sense or in another respect, it indeed truly closes, inasmuch as from the principial point of view (and no longer from the perspective of manifestation) the end is necessarily identical with the beginning.

16. Reference can be made to what we have said in 'La jonction des extrêmes' [in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, May 1940, and also ch. 29 of *Initiation et Réalisation spirituelle*].

is, in fact, somewhat complex;[17] the verbal root *aksh*, from which this word is derived, means to attain, to penetrate, to pass through, whence, for *aksha*, the primary sense of 'axis'. Moreover, this word, and the word 'axis' itself are manifestly identical. Referring to the considerations we have already given, one can see there at once a direct connection with the essentially 'axial' meaning of the *sūtrātmā*. But how is it that *aksha* has come to denote no longer the thread of the rosary but the beads themselves? In order to understand this, it must be realised that in most of its secondary applications, this designation has in a way been transferred (by a passage, it might be said, from the active to the passive sense) from the axis itself to what it traverses and, more particularly, to its point of penetration. It is thus, for example, that the *aksha* is the 'eye' of a wheel, that is, its nave;[18] and the idea of the 'eye' (a sense that the word *aksha* has quite frequently in its composites) leads us back to the symbolic conception of the axis as 'solar rays', illuminating the worlds even as it penetrates them. *Aksha* is also a die to be thrown, apparently because of the 'eyes' or points with which its different faces are marked;[19] and it is also the name of a kind of seed from which rosaries are commonly made, because the perforation of the rosary beads is also an 'eye', destined precisely to allow the passage of the axial thread.[20] That further confirms what we said just now about the primordial importance of the thread in the symbol of the 'chain of the worlds', for it is from it that the beads which compose the chain receive secondarily their designation, just as the worlds, one could say, are not really 'worlds' except insofar as they are penetrated by the *sūtrātmā*.[21]

The number of the beads of the rosary varies according to the traditions, and even according to certain more specialised applications. But in the Oriental forms, at least, it is always a cyclic number. Thus in India and Tibet for example, the most common number is 108. In reality, the states which constitute universal manifestation are indefinitely multitudinous, but it is obvious that this multitude could not be adequately represented in a symbol of the sensible order such as that which is in question here, and it is necessary that the beads be definite in number.[22] This being the case, a cyclic number is naturally quite fitting for a circular figure such as we have in view here and which itself represents a cycle, or rather, as we said previously, a 'cycle of cycles'.

17. We are indebted to Coomaraswamy for the following data on this subject.

18. What we said previously about several related symbols—the 'eye' of the dome, the 'eye' of the needle—will be recalled here.

19. What is to be noted also from the point of view of the doctrine of the cycles, is that the designations of these faces, according to the number of their points, are the same as those of the *Yugas*.

20. The name of the seed, *rudrāksha*, is explained as 'having a red eye' (naturally, and before the perforation); the rosary is also called *rudrāksha-valaya*, ring or circle of *rudrākshas*.

21. The Sanskrit word *loka*, world, is related etymologically to light and sight, and is consequently also related to the symbolism of the 'eye' and that of the 'solar ray'.

22. Likewise, moreover, even in language, indefinity is often expressed by a number such as ten thousand, as we have explained elsewhere (cf., *Les Principes du Calcul infinitesimal*, ch. 9).

In the Islamic tradition, the number of beads is 99, a number which is likewise 'circular' by its factor of 9 and which here, beyond that, refers to the divine Names.[23] As each seed represents a world, this may also be related to the angels considered as 'rectors of the spheres',[24] each angel representing or somehow expressing a divine attribute,[25] to which that world of which it is the 'spirit' will be more particularly related. On the other hand, it is said that a bead is lacking to complete the hundred (which is the equivalent of bringing multiplicity back to unity), for 99 = 100 − 1, and that this bead which is that of the 'Name of the Essence' (*Ismu dh-Dhāt*) can be found only in Paradise.[26] This is a point that demands several further explanations.

The number 100, like 10 of which it is the square, normally can refer only to a rectilinear measure, and not to a circular one,[27] so that it cannot be counted on the circumference of the 'chain of the worlds'; but the missing unity corresponds precisely to what we have called the point of junction of the extremities of this chain, a point which, we repeat, does not pertain to the series of manifested states. In geometric symbolism, this point, instead of being on the circumference which represents the whole of manifestation, will be at the very centre of this circumference, the return to the Principle always being represented as a return to the centre.[28] The Principle, in fact, cannot appear in manifestation except by its attributes, that is, according to Hindu idiom, except by its 'non-supreme' aspects which are, to revert to our initial symbol the forms donned by the *sūtrātmā* in relation to the different worlds that it traverses (even though, in reality, the *sūtrātmā* is not in any way affected by these forms which are, in fact, only appearances due to manifestation itself). But the Principle in itself, that is, the Supreme Self (*Paramātmā* and no longer *sūtrātmā*), or the Essence considered as absolutely independent of any attribution or determination whatever, could not be considered as entering into relation with manifestation, even in illusory mode, although manifestation proceeds from it and depends entirely upon it in all that it is—otherwise it would not be real in any degree whatsoever.[29]

23. Furthermore, the 99 beads are divided into three series of 33. Thus one finds here the multiples whose symbolic importance we have already noted.

24. It will be remembered that likewise in the West, St Thomas Aquinas expressly taught the doctrine that *angelus movet stellam*. This doctrine, moreover, was quite widely held in the Middle Ages; but it is one of those that men of today, even when they call themselves 'Thomists', prefer to pass over in silence in order not to run too much counter to the commonly accepted 'mechanistic' notions.

25. Although we have already pointed this out on various occasions, we propose to return to it more specifically in a forthcoming article.

26. In the angelic correspondence that we just mentioned, this hundredth bead must be related to the 'Angel of the Face' (who is in reality more than an angel), *Metatron* or *ar-Rūḥ*.

27. Cf., *The Great Triad*, ch. 8.

28. This is the return which is expressed in the *Qur'ān* (2: 156) by the words *innā li Llāhi wa innā ilayhi rāji'ūn*. [Verily we are for God, and verily unto Him are we returning.]

29. The absolute transcendence of the Principle in itself necessarily involves the 'irreciprocity of relationship' which, as we have explained elsewhere, formally excludes any 'pantheistic' or 'immanentist' conception.

The circumference exists only through the centre; but the centre does not depend upon the circumference in any way or in any respect. The return to the centre, furthermore, can be conceived at two different levels, and the symbolism of Paradise of which we just spoke is equally applicable to both. If one considers first only the multiple modalities of a certain state of existence, such as the human state, the integration of these modalities will converge on the centre of this state, which is in fact Paradise (*al-Jannah*) understood in its most immediate and most literal acceptation; but this is still only a relative meaning and, if the totality of manifestation is in question, it is necessary, in order to be freed from it without the least trace of conditional existence, to bring about a transposition from the centre of a single state to the centre of the total being, which is what is designated by analogy as the 'Paradise of the Essence' (*Jannatu-dh-Dhāt*). Let us add that in this latter case the 'hundredth bead' of the rosary is, in truth, the only one that subsists, all the others being finally reabsorbed into it. In the Absolute Reality, indeed, there is no further place for any of the Names which express 'distinctively' the multiplicity of the attributes; there is no longer even *Allāhumma* (the Name equivalent to the Hebrew *Elohim*) which synthesizes this multiplicity of attributes in the unity of the Essence. There is nothing other than *Allāh*, exalted *'ammā yaṣifūn*, that is, beyond all attributes, which are only the refracted aspects of the divine Truth which contingent beings as such are capable of conceiving and expressing.

64 § The Roots of Plants

ACCORDING to the Kabbalistic tradition, among those who made their way into *Pardes*,[1] there are some who 'ravaged the garden'; and more precisely, it is said that these ravages consisted of 'severing the roots of the plants'. In order to understand what this means, it is necessary to refer before all else to the symbolism of the inverted tree, about which we have already spoken on other occasions.[2] The roots are above, that is, in the Principle itself; to cut these roots, therefore, is to consider the 'plants' or the beings they symbolise as in some way having an existence and a reality independent of the Principle. In the case in question, these beings are chiefly the angels, for this naturally relates to degrees of existence of a supra-human order; and it is

1. *Pardes*, represented symbolically as a garden, must in the present context be considered as representing the domain of higher and reserved knowledge. The four letters P R D S, placed in connection with the four rivers of Paradise, then respectively designate the different meanings contained in the sacred Scriptures, to which correspond so many degrees of knowledge. It goes without saying that those who 'ravaged the garden' had in fact reached only a degree from which it remains possible to go astray.

2. See for example 'The World Tree' [53 above].

easy to understand what the consequences of all this can be, in particular for what is wont to be called the 'practical Kabbala'. Indeed, the invocation of angels who are conceived in this way, not as 'celestial intermediaries', which they are from the perspective of traditional orthodoxy, but as veritable independent powers, strictly amounts to 'association' (*shirk* in Arabic) in the sense given this word by the Islamic tradition; for such powers then inevitably appear as associated with the divine Power itself instead of simply being derived from it. These consequences occur likewise, and with all the more reason, in the lower applications relating to the domain of magic, the domain moreover where those who commit such an error necessarily find themselves imprisoned sooner or later; for through this very error there could no longer be for them any question of theurgy, all effective communication with the Principle becoming impossible once 'the roots are cut'. We will add that these same consequences extend even to the most degenerate forms of magic, such as 'ceremonial magic'; but in this last case, though the error is always essentially the same, the real dangers are at least attenuated by the insignificance of the results that can be obtained.[3] Finally, it should be mentioned that this immediately provides the explanation for at least one of the ways in which the origin of such deviations is sometimes attributed to 'fallen angels'. The angels are indeed truly fallen once they are conceived in this way, as it is by their participation in the Principle that they really have all that constitutes their being, so much so that when this participation is misunderstood, nothing remains but an aspect that is purely negative, like a kind of inverted shadow in relation to that being in itself.[4]

According to the orthodox conception, an angel, as 'celestial intermediary', is fundamentally nothing other than the expression of a divine attribute in the order of supraformal manifestation; for it is only at this level that there can be established, through such an expression, a real communication between the human state and the Principle itself, of which the intermediary in question thus represents an aspect more particularly accessible to the beings who are in the human state. It is this, moreover, that is clearly shown by the very names of the angels which in fact are always the designations of such and such divine attributes. In fact, it is here especially that the name corresponds fully to the nature of the being and is truly one with its very essence. As long as this meaning is not lost sight of, therefore, the 'roots'

3. On the question of 'ceremonial magic', cf., *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, ch. 20. The use of divine and angelic names in their Hebraic forms is doubtless one of the principal reasons that have led A. E. Waite to think that all ceremonial magic owed its origin to the Jews. (*The Secret Tradition in Freemasonry*, pp. 397–99). This opinion does not seem to us to be justified, for the truth is rather that in all this there are borrowings from more ancient and more authentic forms of magic and that, in the Western world, these really had no sacred language at their disposal other than Hebrew.

4. One could say—and it matters little if this be taken literally or symbolically—that in these conditions, he who thinks to call up an angel greatly risks seeing, on the contrary, a demon appear before him.

cannot be cut. It could be said, consequently, that the error of believing that the divine name belongs rightly to the angel as such, that is, as a separated being, becomes possible only when the understanding of the sacred language becomes clouded; and if account be taken of all that this really implies, it will be understood that this remark admits of a much more profound meaning than may appear at first sight.[5] These considerations also give all its value to the Kabbalistic interpretation of *Malaki*, 'My angel' or 'My envoy',[6] as 'the angel in whom is My name', that is, in whom God himself is, at least under one of His 'attributive' aspects.[7] This interpretation applies in the first instance and pre-eminently to *Metatron*, the 'angel of the Face',[8] or to *Mikaël* (of which *Malaki* is the anagram) in that in his 'solar' function he is in a certain way identified with *Metatron*. But it is applicable also to every angel, because every angel is truly and in the most rigorous sense of the word, the 'bearer' of the divine name with regard to manifestation; and even, as seen from the side of the Truth (*al-Ḥaqq*), it is really not other than this very name. The only difference here is that which results from a certain hierarchy that can be established between the divine attributes, according to whether they proceed more or less directly from the Essence, so that their manifestation can be considered as situated at different levels, and this is in fact the basis of the angelic hierarchies. These attributes or these aspects, furthermore, must necessarily be conceived as being of indefinite multitude once they are envisaged 'distinctively'; and it is to this that the very multitude of the angels corresponds.[9]

It could be asked why we have been considering here only the angels, whereas in truth every being, whatever it may be and to whatever order of existence it belongs, also depends entirely upon the Principle in all that it is; and this dependence, which is also a participation, could be said to be the very measure of its reality. Moreover, every being has in its centre, at least virtually, a divine principle without which its existence would not even be an illusion, but indeed a nothingness pure and simple. This corresponds exactly to the Kabbalistic teaching according to which the 'channels' by which the influences emanating from the Principle are communicated to

5. Let us recall in this connection what we said above as to the correspondence of the different degrees of knowledge with the more or less inner meanings of the sacred Scriptures. Obviously, it is a question here of something that has nothing in common with the wholly outward learning which is all that can be provided by the study of a profane language and even, let us add, the study of a sacred language by profane methods such as those of modern linguists

6. The etymological meaning of the word *angel* (in Greek, *aggelos*) is 'sent' or 'messenger'. And the corresponding Hebrew word *mal'akh* has the same sense.

7. Cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 3. From the principial point of view, it is the angel or rather the attribute that it represents that is in God, but the relation appears as inverted with reference to manifestation.

8. The name *Metatron* is numerically equivalent to the divine name *Shaddai*.

9. It must be well understood that here it is a question of a 'transcendental' multitude, and not of a numerical indefinity (cf., *Les Principes du Calcul infinitesimal*, ch. 3). The angels are in no way 'countable', as they do not belong to the domain of existence which is conditioned by quantity.

manifested beings do not stop at a certain level but extend step by step to all degrees of universal Existence, even to the lowest,[10] so much so that, to take up once again our initial symbolism, there could not be anywhere any being which might be compared to a 'plant without roots'. It is obvious, however, that there are degrees to take into account in the participation in question, and that these degrees correspond precisely to the degrees of Existence. This is why the higher these degrees are, that is, the nearer they are to the Principle, the greater their reality (although there is certainly no common measure between any state of manifestation, be it the highest of all, and the principial state itself). The first difference that calls for mention here, as elsewhere, is the difference between the case of beings situated in the domain of supraformal or supraindividual manifestation to which the angelic states correspond, and that of beings situated in the domain of formal or individual manifestation; and this has yet to be given as precise an explanation as it needs.

It is only in the supraformal order that a being can be said to express or manifest an attribute of the Principle as truly and as integrally as possible. It is the distinction of these attributes which causes in this case the distinction of beings, and their distinction can be characterised as a 'distinction without separation' (*bhedābheda* in Hindu terminology), for it goes without saying that ultimately all these attributes are really 'one'; and this is the least limitation conceivable in a state which, being manifested, is also conditioned by this very fact. On the other hand, as the nature of each such being is concentrated entirely as it were on the expression of a single attribute, it is thereby evident that this being possesses in itself a unity of an entirely different order and one far more real than the very relative unity, both fragmentary and 'composite', that belongs to individual beings as such; and fundamentally, it is by reason of the reduction of the angelic nature to a definitive attribute, without any composition other than the blending of act and potency which is necessarily inherent in all manifestation,[12] that St Thomas Aquinas was able to consider the differences between the angels as comparable to differences between species and not to individual differences.[13] If one now wishes to find in the order of formal manifestation a correspondence or a reflection of what we have just said, it is not the individual beings taken each in its particularity that must be considered (and this results clearly enough from the last remark), but the 'worlds' or states of existence themselves, each of them in its entirety, 'globally' as it were, being linked more especially to a certain divine attribute of which it will be, if we may use

10. The symbolism of these 'channels' descending gradually in this way through all states can help us to understand, if we look at them in the ascendant direction, how the beings situated on a higher level can, in a general way, play the part of 'intermediary' for those situated on a lower level, because communication with the Principle is not possible for the inferior without passing through the domain of the superior.

11. Cf., *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 9.

12. It could be said that the angelic being is 'in act' in respect of the attribute which it expresses, but 'in potency' in respect of all the other attributes.

13. Cf., *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 11.

such an expression, the particular production;[14] and this takes us back directly to the conception of the angels as 'rectors of the spheres', along with the considerations we have already pointed out in this connection in our chapter on the 'chain of the worlds'.

65 § The Symbolism of the Bridge

THOUGH we have already spoken of the symbolism of the bridge on different occasions, we will add some further considerations in connection with a study by Doña Luisa Coomaraswamy on this subject[1] in which she emphasises particularly a point that shows the close connection of this symbolism with the doctrine of the *sūtrātmā*. What is involved is the original meaning of the word *setu* which is the oldest of the different Sanskrit terms for bridge and the only one found in the *Rig Veda*. This word, derived from the root *si*, 'to attach', means strictly a bond or a tie; and, in fact, the bridge thrown over a river is indeed what links one bank to the other; but over and above this very general remark there is in addition, in what is implied by this term, something much more precise. The bridge must be thought of as primitively constituted by lines or cords, which are its most orthodox natural model, or by a rope fastened in the same way as these, for example, to trees growing on the two banks, so that the banks are seen to be actually 'attached' to each other by the rope. Since the two banks symbolically represent two different states of the being, it is obvious that the rope plays the same part here as the thread which unites all these states, that is, the *sūtrātmā* itself. The quality of such a bond, both slender and strong, is also an adequate image of its spiritual nature; and this is why the bridge, which is also assimilated to a ray of light, is often described traditionally as being as narrow as the edge of a sword, or again, if it is made of wood, as formed from a single beam or a single tree trunk.[2] This narrowness brings out the peril of the way in question which, moreover, is the only way possible, but which all do not succeed in traversing and which very few indeed can pass over unaided, by their own means,[3]

14. It goes without saying that such a manner of speaking is valid only from the point of view that looks at the attributes themselves distinctively (and they can be so considered only in relation to manifestation), whereas the indivisible unity of the Divine Essence itself, to which all is finally brought back, cannot be affected by that manifestation in any way whatsoever.

1. 'The Perilous Bridge of Welfare' in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, August 1944 [Luisa Coomaraswamy was the wife of Ananda Coomaraswamy to whose work Guénon has so frequently referred in recent chapters. Tr.].

2. Let us recall in this connection the double sense of the English word *beam* which designates both a girder and a luminous ray, as we have already remarked elsewhere ('Maçons et Charpentiers' in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, December 1946 [and republished in the posthumous collection of the author's studies, *Etudes sur la Franc-Maçonnerie et le Compagnonnage*, vol II, Paris, Editions Traditionelles, 1964].

3. This is a privilege only of the 'solar heros' in the myths and tales in which the crossing of a bridge is involved.

for there is always a certain danger in the passage from one state to another; but this danger relates especially to the double sense, 'benefic' and 'malefic', which the bridge has in common with so many other symbols, and to which we shall have to return shortly.

The two worlds represented by the two shores are, in the most general sense, heaven and earth which at the beginning were united but which were separated by the fact of manifestation, the entire domain of which is then assimilated to a river or to a sea that lies between them.[4] The bridge, therefore, is the exact equivalent of the axial pillar that links heaven and earth even while holding them apart; and it is because of this meaning that it must be conceived of as essentially vertical[5] like all the other symbols of the 'World Axis'—for example, the axle of the 'cosmic chariot' when its two wheels represent heaven and earth.[6] This establishes also the fundamental identity of the symbolism of the bridge with that of the ladder which was the theme of an earlier chapter.[7] Crossing the bridge is thus nothing other than the passage along the axis which alone truly unites the different states one to another. The bank from which the bridge extends is, in fact, this world, that is, the state in which the being who has to traverse the axis actually is; and the bank to which it ultimately leads, after having passed through the other states of manifestation, is the principial world. One of the two banks is the domain of death, where everything is subject to change, and the other is the domain of immortality.[8]

4. In all the more restricted applications of this same symbolism, it will always be a question of two states that, from a certain 'level of reference', have between them a relationship corresponding to that between heaven and earth.

5. In this respect and in connection with what has just been said, we will recall the 'rope trick' that is so often described, in which a rope thrown into the air remains or seems to remain vertical while a man or a child climbs it until he disappears from view. Even if this should be, most often at least, only a phenomenon of suggestion, that is of little importance from our present point of view, nor is it any the less a very significant representation of what we are discussing. The same applies to the ascent of a pole.

6. Mme. Coomaraswamy remarked that if there are cases where the bridge is described as having the shape of an arch, which identifies it more or less explicitly with the rainbow, these cases are far from being the most frequent in traditional symbolism. We will add that even this is not in contradiction with the conception of the bridge as vertical, for as we said in connection with the 'chain of the worlds', a curved line of indefinite length can be assimilated, in each of its portions, to a straight line which will always be vertical in the sense that it will be perpendicular to the domain of existence that it passes through. Moreover even where the bridge and the rainbow are not identical, the rainbow in itself is none the less very generally considered to be a symbol of the union of heaven and earth.

7. 'The Symbolism of the Ladder' [56 above].

8. It is evident that in the general symbolism of the passage over the waters, conceived as leading from 'death to immortality', the crossing by means of a bridge or by a ford corresponds only to the case where the passage is from one bank to the other, to the exclusion of those where it is described either as a movement against the current to its source, or, on the contrary, as a descent towards the sea, and where the voyage must necessarily be accomplished by other means, for example, in conformity with the symbolism of navigation, which moreover is applicable to all cases (see 'Passing Over the Waters') [58 above].

We recalled just now that the axis both links and separates heaven and earth. Similarly, though the bridge is really the way that unites the two shores and allows the passage from one to the other, it may none the less be, in a sense, like an obstacle placed between them, which brings us once again to its 'perilous' nature. This is itself implied, moreover, in the meaning of the word *sētu*, which is a bond in the two senses in which it can be understood: on the one hand, that which connects two things to each other, but also, on the other hand, a fetter in which the being finds itself caught. A rope can serve equally well for either of these two purposes, and the bridge will appear likewise under one or the other aspect, that is, as benefic or malefic, according to whether the being is successful or not in freeing itself from it. It can be noted that the double symbolic sense of the bridge results also from the fact that it can be traversed in the two opposite directions, while nevertheless it must be crossed in only one direction, that going from 'this shore' towards the 'other', any turning back constituting a danger to be avoided,[9] except in the case of the being who, already freed from conditioned existence, can henceforth 'move at will' through all the worlds and for whom such a reversal is moreover only a purely illusory appearance. In every other case but this, the part of a bridge that has already been traversed must normally be 'lost from view' and become as if it no longer existed, just as the symbolic ladder is always regarded as having its feet in the very domain where the climber actually finds himself, the lower part of the ladder disappearing for him insofar as his ascent has been accomplished.[10] So long as the being has not reached the principial world, from which he may re-descend into manifestation without being affected in any way, realisation cannot in fact be accomplished except in an ascending direction; and for anyone who should attach himself to the way for its own sake, thus taking the means for the end, that way would become veritably an obstacle instead of leading him effectively to liberation. This implies that he must continue to destroy the ties that bind him to the stages he has already traversed, until the axis is finally reduced to a single point which contains all and is the centre of the total being.

9. Hence the allusions, so frequently to be found in myths and legends of every provenance, to the danger of going back on one's tracks or of looking behind.

10. There is here something like a 'reabsorption' of the axis by the being who ascends it, as we have already explained in *The Great Triad*, to which we will also refer in connection with certain other related points, such as the identification of this being with the axis itself, whatever the symbol by which it is represented. In the case of the bridge, this identification gives the real sense of the pontifical function to which this phrase from *The Mabinogion* alludes, along with other traditional formulas cited by Mme. Coomaraswamy: 'He who would be Chief, let him be the Bridge' [*The Mabinogion* is a collection of medieval Welsh tales, apparently reduced to written form in the fourteenth century, but which are most probably much older, having been passed down from generation to generation orally. The content is Celtic mythology and folk themes. The title of the collection is modern. Tr.].

66 § The Bridge and the Rainbow

As we have pointed out, in connection with the bridge and its essentially axial meaning, its symbolism is less often associated with that of the rainbow than is commonly thought. Assuredly, there are cases where such an association exists, and one of the most obvious is that which is to be found in the Scandanavian tradition, where the bridge of *Byfrost* is expressly identified with the rainbow. Elsewhere, when the bridge is described as rising in a part of its length and sloping downwards in the other, that is, as having the form of an arch, it seems rather that these descriptions may have quite often been influenced by a secondary comparison with the rainbow without this implying a true identification of these two symbols. This comparison is easily explained, moreover, by the fact that the rainbow is generally considered as symbolising the union of heaven and earth. Between the means by which communication of earth with heaven is established and the sign of their union, there is an obvious connection; but it is one which does not necessarily entail an assimilation or an identification. We will add at once that this very meaning of the rainbow, which is found in one form or another in most traditions, results directly from its close relationship with rain, for rain, as we have explained elsewhere, represents the descent of celestial influences into the terrestrial world.[1]

The best known example in the West of this traditional meaning of the rainbow is naturally the Biblical text where it is plainly expressed.[2] It is said here: 'I shall place my bow in the clouds, and it will be for a sign of the covenant between me and the earth'. But it is to be noted that this 'sign of the covenant' is in no way presented as allowing the passage from one world to another, a passage to which there is not the least allusion in this text. In other cases the same meaning is expressed in very different forms: with the Greeks, for example, the rainbow was assimilated to the mantle of Iris, or perhaps to Iris herself at a time when, in symbolic representations, 'anthropomorphism' had not yet been pushed so far by them as it was to be later. This signification is implied here by the fact that Iris was the 'messenger of the gods' and consequently played a part as intermediary between heaven and earth. But it goes without saying that such a representation is in every respect remote from the symbolism of the bridge. On the whole the rainbow seems to have been above all connected, in a general way, with the cosmic currents by which an exchange of influences between heaven and earth operates much more than with the axis along which the direct communication between the different states is effected; and this does

1. See 'The Light and the Rain' [62 above]; cf., also *The Great Triad*, ch. 14.
2. Genesis 9: 12–17.

moreover accord better with its curved form,[3] for as we remarked earlier, even though that form itself is not necessarily in contradiction with an idea of 'verticality', it is none the less true that this idea is not readily suggested by the rainbow at first sight as it is, on the contrary, in the case of all strictly axial symbols.

It must be recognised that the symbolism of the rainbow is in reality very complex and has multiple aspects; but among these, perhaps one of the most important (although it may appear rather surprising at first sight), and in any case the one most clearly related to what we have just been saying, is the aspect which assimilates the rainbow to a serpent, and which is to be found in very diverse traditions. It has been shown that the Chinese characters designating the rainbow have the root 'serpent', even though this assimilation may not be formally expressed elsewhere in the Far Eastern tradition, so that a kind of memory could be seen in this of something that probably goes back to a very remote past.[4] It would seem that this symbolism may not have been entirely unknown to the Greeks themselves, at least in the archaic period, for according to Homer the rainbow was represented on the breastplate of Agamemnon by an azure serpent. There were three on each side, 'like unto rainbows that Zeus imprinted in the clouds as a memorable sign to men'.[5] In any case, in certain regions of Africa, for example in Dahomey, the 'celestial serpent' is assimilated to the rainbow and, at the same time, is regarded as the master of precious stones and of wealth. It might seem that there is here a certain confusion between two different aspects of the symbolism of the serpent; for if the function of master or guardian of treasures is in fact quite often attributed to serpents or dragons, among other entities of various forms, this makes them distinctly subterranean rather than celestial; but it is also possible that there might be a correspondence between these two apparently opposed aspects, comparable to that which exists between the planets and metals.[6] From another angle it is curious, to say the least, to note in this connection that the 'celestial serpent' has a rather striking similarity to the 'green serpent' of the well known symbolic tale of Goethe, the serpent that transforms itself into a bridge, then fragments itself into precious stones. If this 'green serpent' must also be considered as having a connection with the rainbow, that would bring us back to the identification of the rainbow with the bridge, which would be all the less surprising in that Goethe, on this point, could indeed have been thinking of the Scandanavian tradition. Besides, it must be said that the tale in question is very unclear, both as to the provenance of the various elements of the symbolism by which Goethe might have been inspired, as well as to the meaning itself, and that all the

3. It is to be understood, of course, that from this point of view a circular or semicircular form such as the rainbow can always be considered as the plane projection of a portion of a spiral.

4. Cf., Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs*, p. 328.

5. *Iliad* 11: 26–8.

6. *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 22.

interpretations that have been attempted are really on the whole unsatisfactory.[7] We do not wish to dwell further on this, but it seemed to us that it might not be without interest to note in passing the somewhat unexpected comparison it gives rise to.[8]

It is known that one of the chief symbolic meanings of the serpent is related to the cosmic currents that we alluded to above, currents which in fact are nothing other than the effect and as it were the expression of the actions and reactions of the forces emanating respectively from heaven and earth.[9] It is this which gives the only plausible explanation of the assimilation of the rainbow to the serpent, and this explanation is in perfect accord, on the other hand, with the recognition of the rainbow as sign of the union of heaven and earth, a union which is in a way manifested by these currents, for without it they could not exist. It must be added that the serpent, when it has this meaning, is most often associated with axial symbols such as the tree or the staff. This is easy to understand, for it is the very direction of the axis which determines that of the cosmic currents, but without these being confused with the axis, any more than—to use the corresponding symbolism under its most rigorous form—a spiral drawn on a cylinder is confused with the axis of this cylinder. Between the rainbow and the bridge as symbols, a similar connection could, on the whole, be considered as the most normal one; but this connection has led, in certain cases, to a kind of fusion of the two symbols, which would not be entirely justified unless the duality of the differentiated cosmic currents were considered at the same time as being resolved into the unity of an axial current. None the less, account must be taken of the fact that the representations of the bridge differ according to whether or not it is assimilated to the rainbow; and in this respect, it could be asked if between the straight[10] and the arched bridge there is not, at least in principle, a difference in meaning corresponding in a certain way to that

7. Moreover, there is often something confused and nebulous in the way that Goethe makes use of symbolism, and this is also borne out by his handling of the Faust legend. Let us add that there would be more than one question to be asked as regards the sources which he was able to draw on more or less directly, as well as the exact nature of the initiatic ties he may have had apart from Masonry.

8. As regards the assimilation of Goethe's serpent to the rainbow, we cannot accept as argument the colour green which is attributed to the serpent, even though some have wanted to make green a kind of synthesis of the rainbow on the grounds of its being the central colour; but in fact, it does not really occupy a central position there, except on the condition that indigo be admitted into the list of colours, and we have explained previously the reasons why this introduction is really meaningless and devoid of any value from the symbolic point of view ('The Seven Rays and the Rainbow' [59 above]). We will mention in this connection that the axis corresponds strictly to the 'seventh ray' and consequently to the colour white, while the very differentiation of the colours of the rainbow indicates a certain 'exteriority' in relation to this axial ray.

9. *The Great Triad*, ch. 5.

10. We will recall that this rectilinear and naturally vertical form is that which corresponds, for example, to the precise sense of the expression *aṣ-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* in the Islamic tradition (cf., *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 25).

which exists (as we have indicated elsewhere) between the vertical ladder and the spiral stairway,[11] the difference between the 'axial' way, which leads the being directly to the principial state, and the more 'peripheral' way which implies the passage through a series of hierarchic states one by one, even though in both cases the final goal is necessarily the same.[12]

67 § The Chain of Union

One of the Masonic symbols which tends in our day to be least understood is the 'chain of union'[1] that surrounds the upper part of the Lodge. Some are inclined to see in this the chalk-line with which the operative Masons would trace out the contour of a building. They are certainly right but, even so, this is insufficient, and it must at least be asked what was the symbolic value of the chalk-line itself.[2] Moreover such a position accorded to a 'tool' for making an outline on the ground might well seem abnormal, and this also calls for some explanation.

In order to understand these points, it must first of all be remembered that from the traditional point of view, any edifice whatsoever was always built according to a cosmic model. It is clearly specified, moreover, that the Lodge is the image of the Cosmos, and we have here no doubt the last remnant of this idea that has continued to exist in the Western world until today. In view of this tradition, the site of a building had to be determined and 'enframed' by something which in a certain way corresponded to what might be called the very 'frame' of the Cosmos; we shall soon see what this is, and we can say at once that the 'materialised' delineation by the chalk-line represented strictly speaking its terrestrial projection. We have moreover already seen something comparable in the plan of cities established according to traditional rules;[3] in fact, the case of the city and that of buildings taken separately do not differ essentially in this respect, for it is really always a question of imitating the same cosmic model.

11. 'The Symbolism of the Ladder' [56 above].

12. The initiatic use of the spiral staircase is explained by the identification of the degrees of initiation with as many different states of the being. One can cite as example of this, from Masonic symbolism, the winding staircase of 15 treads, divided into 3 + 5 + 7, which leads to the 'Middle Chamber'. In the other case, the same hierarchical states are also represented by the rungs, but their disposition and very shape indicates that one cannot stop on them and that they are only the means of a continuous ascension, while it is always possible to tarry more or less on the steps of a staircase or at least on the landings between different flights into which the stairs are divided.

1. The term used by the medieval guilds is 'chain of alliance'.

2. This symbol also bears another denomination, 'serrated crest', which seems rather to designate the periphery of a canopy. Now, it is clear that the canopy is a symbol of heaven (for example, the chariot canopy in the Far Eastern tradition); but there is no contradiction here, as will be seen.

3. See 'The Zodiac and the Cardinal Points' [15 above].

When the building is constructed, and even once it has begun to rise, the chalk-line obviously has no further part to play. Thus the position of the 'chain of union' does not refer precisely to the outline which it has served to effect, but much rather to its cosmic prototype, the remembrance of which on the contrary always helps to determine the symbolic meaning of the Lodge and of its different parts. The chalk-line itself, under this form of the 'chain of union', then becomes the symbol of the 'framework' of the Cosmos; and its position is to be understood without difficulty if, as is in fact the case, this 'framework' has a celestial and no longer a terrestrial significance.[4] We will add that by such a transposition the earth simply restores to heaven what had initially been borrowed from it.

What makes the meaning of this symbol particularly clear is that while the chalk-line as tool is naturally a plain line, the 'chain of union' on the contrary has knots at intervals.[5] These knots are or ought normally to be twelve[6] in number, and thus they evidently correspond to the signs of the Zodiac.[7] It is indeed the Zodiac, within which the planets move, that truly constitutes the 'envelope' of the Cosmos, that is, the 'framework' of which we have spoken,[8] and it is obvious that there is really, as we have said, a celestial 'framework' here.

Now there is still something else that is no less important: a 'framework' has among its functions, and perhaps even as its principal function, that of maintaining in their place the diverse elements that it contains or encloses within itself, so as to form an ordered whole, which is moreover commonly known to be the etymological meaning of the word 'Cosmos'.[9] Thus, it

4. This is why the assimilation to the periphery of a canopy is also justified, which it obviously would not be for the terrestrial projection of this celestial frame.

5. These knots are called 'lakes of love'. This name, as well as the particular form of the knots, in a certain sense perhaps bears the mark of the eighteenth century; but nevertheless, it may also be that there is here a vestige of something that goes back much further and which may even be quite directly related to the symbolism of the *Fedeli d'Amore*.

6. The 'Board of the Lodge', in fact no longer in use, which is represented at the head of Ragon's *Maçonnerie occulte*, is clearly incorrect, not only for the number of knots in the 'chain of union' but also for the strange and even inexplicable position which is attributed to the zodiacal signs.

7. Some people think that these twelve knots imply, 'ideally' at least, the existence of an equal number of columns—ten in addition to the two columns of the West which correspond to the extremities of the 'chain of union'. It is to be noted in this connection that a similar arrangement, though in a circular form, is to be found in certain megalithic monuments that are also clearly related to the Zodiac.

8. See also, as regards the zodiacal division of cities, the already referred to chapter 15. As to what remains to be said here, it is to be noted that it is this very division which assigns their respective places to the different elements whose union constitutes the city. Another example of the zodiacal 'envelope' is to be found in the Far Eastern symbolism of the *Ming-tang* with its twelve openings which we have explained elsewhere (*The Great Triad*, ch. 16).

9. It can be said that our world is 'ordered' by the combined temporal and spatial determinations that are linked to the Zodiac through its direct relationship with the annual cycle on the one hand, and on the other through its correspondence with the directions of space (it goes without saying that this last point of view is closely related to the question of the traditional orientation of buildings).

must in some way 'link' or 'unite' these elements among themselves, which the designation 'chain of union' formally expresses; and it is even from this that the most profound meaning derives, for as with all symbols in the form of a chain, a rope, or a thread, it is to the *sūtrātmā* that it ultimately refers. We will limit ourselves to calling attention to this point without entering here and now into more ample explanations, because we shall soon have to return to it, inasmuch as this characteristic is still more clearly apparent in the case of certain other symbolic 'frameworks' which we are going to examine.

68 § Frameworks and Labyrinths

ANANDA COOMARASWAMY has studied[1] the symbolic meaning of certain 'knots' which are to be found among the engravings of Albrecht Dürer. These 'knots' are very complicated tangles formed by the tracing of a single line, the whole being arranged in a circular figure. In several cases, the name of Dürer is inscribed in the central portion. These knots have been compared with a similar figure generally attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, and at the centre of which one reads the words *Academia Leonardo Vinci* (*figures* 22 & 23). Some have been inclined to see in this design the 'collective signature' of an esoteric 'Academy', a number of these having existed in Italy in that period, and doubtless this is not incorrect. In fact, these designs have but sometimes been called 'mazes' or 'labyrinths' and, as Coomaraswamy remarks, despite the differences in form which may be due in part to technical reasons, in actual fact they are closely related to labyrinths and more particularly to those outlined on the pavement of certain medieval churches. Now these are also thought of as constituting a 'collective signature' of the construction guilds. Insofar as they signify the link uniting the members of an initiatic or at least esoteric organisation among themselves, these diagrams obviously offer a striking similarity with the Masonic 'chain of union'; and if the knots in the 'chain' are recalled, the name of 'knots' (*Knoten*) given to the designs, apparently by Dürer himself, is likewise very significant. For this reason, as well as for another which we will come to later, it is also important to call attention to the fact that these lines are of unbroken continuity.[2] The labyrinths of churches could likewise be traversed from one end to the other without at any point encountering a break that made it necessary to stop or

1. 'The Iconography of Dürer's "Knots" and Leonardo's "Concatenations"', in *The Art Quarterly*, Spring 1944.

2. The *pentalpha*, sign of recognition of the Pythagoreans, may be recalled here; it had to be drawn without a break in continuity.

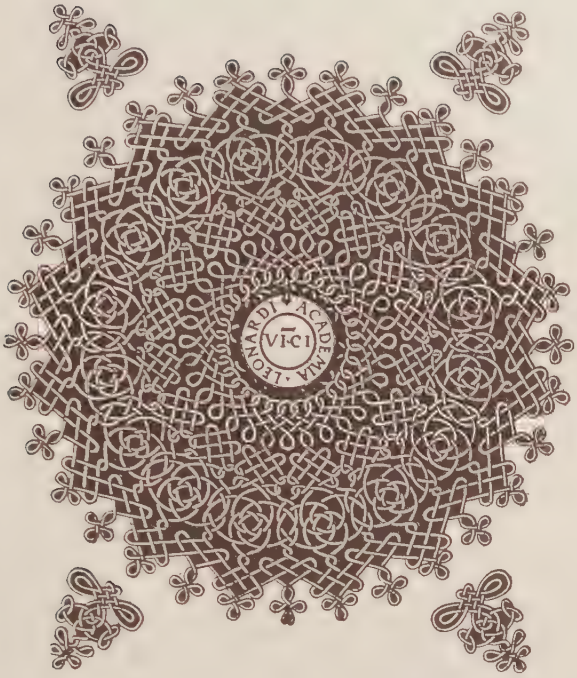


Figure 22
Leonardo's
'Concatenation'

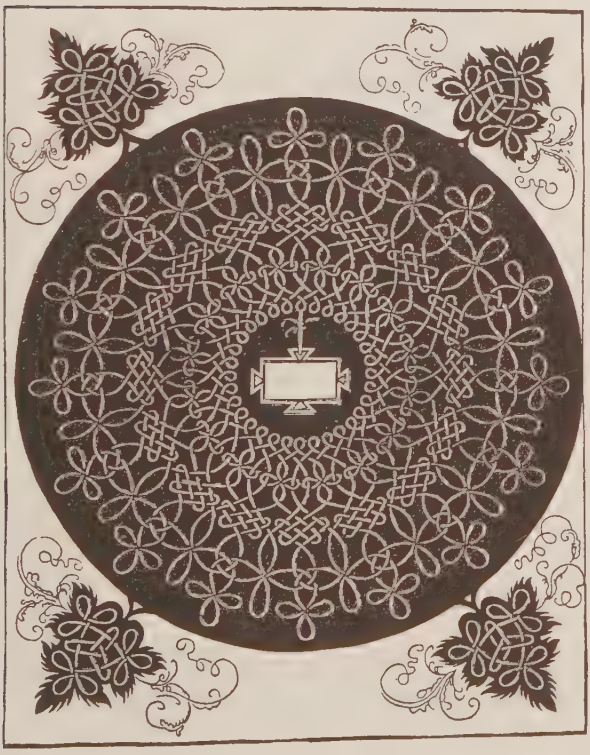


Figure 23
One of Durer's
'Sechs Knoten'

to turn back, so that in reality they simply constituted a very long pathway that had to be entirely completed before reaching the centre.[3] In certain cases, as at Amiens, the master craftsman had himself depicted in the central part, just as da Vinci and Dürer inscribed their names at the centre of their designs. They thereby symbolically placed themselves in a 'Holy Land',[4] in a place reserved for the 'elect', as we have explained elsewhere,[5] or in a spiritual centre which in every case was an image or reflection of the true 'centre of the World', just as in the Far Eastern tradition, the Emperor was always situated at the central place.[6]

This leads us directly to considerations of another order which relate to a more inward and more profound significance of this symbolism. As the being who traverses the labyrinth or any other equivalent representation, thereby finally succeeds in finding the 'central place', that is, from the point of view of initiatic realisation, his own centre,[7] the traversal itself, with all its complications, is obviously a representation of the multiplicity of the states or the modalities of manifested existence,[8] throughout the indefinite series of which the being must first 'wander' before being able to establish himself in this centre. The continuous line is then the image of the *sūtrātmā* which links all the states together, and moreover, in the case of the 'thread of Ariadne' and the passage through the labyrinth, this image is so clear that it is surprising that anyone could fail to perceive it.[9] Thus, the remark with which we ended our previous study on the 'chain of union' finds its justification. On the other hand, we insisted more particularly on this chain's function of acting as a frame; and it is enough to look at the figures of Dürer and da Vinci to see that they too form true 'frameworks' around the central part

3. Cf., W. R. Lethaby, *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, ch. 7. This author, who was himself an architect, has collected in his book a large amount of interesting information about architectural symbolism, but unfortunately he has been unable to bring out its true significance.

4. The labyrinths in question were commonly called 'roads to Jerusalem', and traversing them was considered as a substitute for pilgrimage to the Holy Land. At St-Omer, the centre contained a representation of the Temple of Jerusalem. [As to Dürer, it seems that in fact he left the centres of his woodcuts blank, and it is only in posthumous impressions that we find the initials A. D. Ed.]

5. 'The Cave and the Labyrinth' [31 above].

6. See *The Great Triad*, ch. 14; in the context of this comparison one might recall the title of *Imperator* given to the chief of certain Rosicrucian organisations.

7. This may naturally apply, as the case may be, to the centre of a particular state of existence or of the total being, the first corresponding to the outcome of the Lesser Mysteries and the second to that of the Greater Mysteries.

8. Or, when the Lesser Mysteries are concerned, the multiplicity of the modalities of a single state of manifestation.

9. It is also important in this connection to note that the designs of Dürer and of da Vinci have a manifest resemblance to arabesques, as Coomaraswamy observed. The last vestiges of diagrams of this kind in the Western world are to be found in the flourishes and other complicated ornaments, always formed with an unbroken line, that remained dear to calligraphers and masters of penmanship until about the middle of the nineteenth century, even though by then the symbolism may well have been no longer understood by them.

which constitutes yet one more similarity between these symbols; and there are other cases where we shall find the same feature, in a way that once more brings out the perfect concordance of the different traditions.

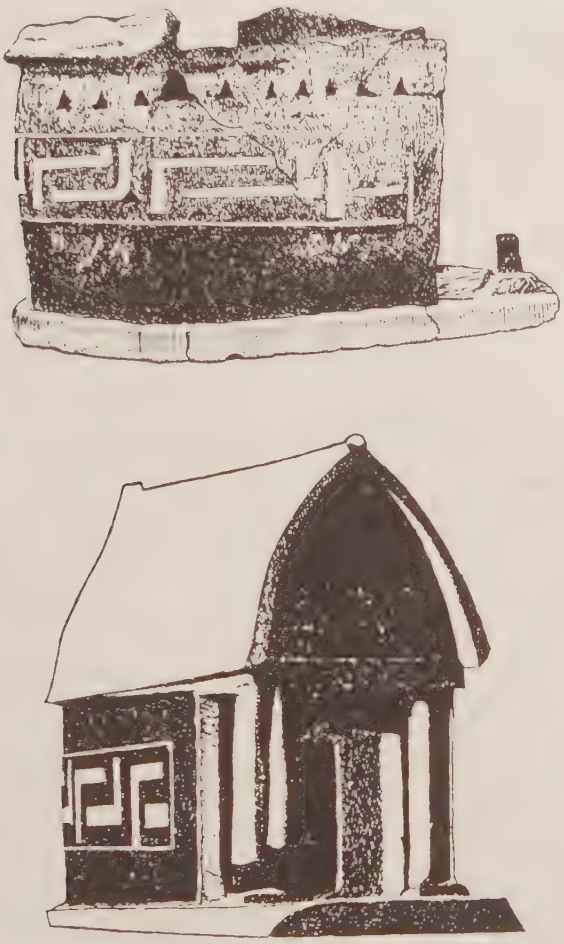


Figure 24

Clay models of Greek buildings of the Geometric Age found in 1933 in Heracum at Perechore near Corinth, which show for the first time how close was the ideal connection among Greeks between the maze or meandor and the walls of houses (after H. G. G. Payne, *JHS* 54, 1934, 191).

In a book of which we have already spoken elsewhere,[10] Jackson Knight has called attention to the discovery in Greece, near Corinth, of two miniature clay models of houses, dating back to the archaic period, the

10. *Cumaean Gates*; see on this subject 'The Cave and the Labyrinth' [31 above].

so-called 'geometric age'.[11] On the outer walls are meanders that surround the house, the lines of which seem in some way to have constituted a kind of substitute for the labyrinth. In so far as this represented a defense, either against human enemies or especially against hostile psychic influences, these meanders can also be considered as having a protective value, even doubly so, not only impeding malefic influences from penetrating into the home, but also impeding benefic influences from leaving it and being dispersed outside. It may have happened at certain times that nothing more was seen in all this; but it must not be forgotten that the reduction of symbols to a more or less 'magical' use already corresponds to a state of degeneration from the traditional point of view, a state in which deeper meanings have been forgotten.[12] Accordingly, at the origin there must have been something else, and it is easy to understand what is really meant if we remember that, traditionally, every edifice is constructed according to a cosmic model. So as long as there was no distinction between sacred and profane, that is, so long as the profane point of view had not arisen as a result of a diminishment of the tradition, it was everywhere and always the case, even for private homes. The home was then an image of the Cosmos, that is, a 'little world', closed and complete in itself; and if it be noted that it is 'framed' by the meander in exactly the same way as the 'chain of union' frames the Lodge—the cosmic significance of which has not been lost—the identity of the two symbols becomes altogether obvious: in both cases we are faced by what is unquestionably nothing other than a representation of the very 'frame' of the Cosmos.

Another remarkable example from the point of view of the symbolism of 'framework' is provided by certain Chinese characters, referring primitively to rites of fixation or stabilisation[13] which consisted of drawing concentric circles or spirals around objects. The character *hēng*, designating such a rite, was formed in ancient Chinese script by a spiral or by two concentric circles between two straight lines. Throughout the ancient world, new foundations, whether of camps, of cities, or of villages, were 'stabilised' by drawing spirals or circles around them;[14] and let it be added that here the real identity of frameworks with labyrinths can still be seen. As regards the character *chich*, which recent commentators render simply as 'great', the author we have just cited says that it denotes the magic that ensures the integrity of spaces by framing them with protective signs. Such is the aim of border designs in ancient works of art. A *chich fu* is a benediction which has

11. The two models are pictured on page 67 of the cited book.

12. Naturally, this profound meaning does not exclude a 'magical' application, any more than any other legitimate application; but the degeneration consists in losing sight of the principle and in no longer seeing anything except a mere isolated application of a lower order.

13. These rites obviously correspond to a particular instance of what in Hermetic language is designated as 'coagulation' (see *The Great Triad*, ch. 6).

14. Arthur Waley, 'The Book of Changes' in *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, number 5, Stockholm, 1934.

been directly or symbolically 'framed' in this way. A plague can also be 'framed' to prevent it from spreading. Here, too, it is explicitly a question of 'magic' only, or of what is supposed to be magic. But the idea of 'fixation' or 'stabilisation' shows clearly enough what is fundamentally involved. It is a question of the framework's already mentioned essential function of gathering together and keeping in place the diverse elements it surrounds. There are moreover passages in Lao-tzu where the characters in question are to be found and which are very significant in this respect: 'When one acts so as to enframe (or circumscribe, *ying*, a character that evokes an idea similar to that of *hēng*) the seven animal spirits and to embrace Unity, one may be closed, impervious and incorruptible';[15] and elsewhere: 'Thanks to a knowledge appropriately enframed (*chich*) we walk without difficulty in the great Way'.[16] In the first of these two passages, it is obviously a question of establishing or maintaining the normal order of the different constitutive elements of the being in order to unify it. In the second passage, a 'well enframed knowledge' is precisely a knowledge in which everything is in exactly the place suited to it. Moreover the cosmic significance of the 'frame' itself has in no way disappeared in such a case. In fact, according to all traditional conceptions, is not the human being the 'microcosm', and must not knowledge, too, somehow embrace the totality of the Cosmos?

69 § The 'Sign of Four'

Among the ancient guild marks, there is one that has a particularly enigmatic character: it is that to which the name 'sign of four' (*quatre de chiffre*)[1] is given, because in fact it has the form of the figure 4, to which supplemental lines, horizontal or vertical, are often added, and which is generally

15. *Tao-teh-king*, ch. 10, unpublished [at the time of Guénon's writing] translation by Jacques Lionnet [text slightly different from the edition published in 1962].

16. *Ibid*, ch. 53, same translation [and same remark as to the 1962 edition. In this translation, when we have had to render a standard text into English, we have generally had recourse to a more or less widely accepted version. In the present instance, the four English translations of the *Tao-teh-king* that we consulted for these two passages (those of Lin Yutang, D. C. Lau, Ch'u-ta-Kao, and James Legge) all differ markedly from that of Jacques Lionnet, and so we have simply translated them as given in Guénon's text. Tr.]

1. [*Quatre de chiffre* is an idiomatic expression that, even in French, is commonly placed in quotation marks; it is not directly translatable. One of the primary usages which is given in all the major comprehensive French-French dictionaries, and which indicates its idiomatic character, is to designate a particular form of snare used in taking small animals. This same device is known in English as a 'figure four trap'—so-called because of the use of three notched sticks arranged in the form of a 4 and fitted together as a trigger. Guénon, however, uses the term in a quite different sense, as will be obvious from the text. The phrase 'Sign of Four', though somewhat arbitrary, seems to approximate the French as closely as possible. Tr.]

combined either with various other symbols or with letters or monograms to form a complex whole in which it always occupies the upper part. This sign was common to a great number of guilds if not, indeed, to all; and we do not understand why an occultist writer (who additionally and gratuitously attributes its origin to the Cathars) has recently claimed that it belonged solely to a 'secret society' of printers and booksellers. It is true that the sign is found in many printers' marks; but it is found no less frequently among stone cutters, makers of stained glass, and tapestry weavers, to cite only a few examples which suffice to show that this opinion cannot be upheld. It has even been noted that private individuals or families had this same sign depicted on their homes, on their tombstones or in their coats of arms; but in some such cases there is nothing to prove that it should not be attributed to a stone cutter rather than to the property owner himself; and in the other cases it is certainly a question of personages who were united by some kind of ties, sometimes hereditary, to certain guilds.[2] However that may be, there can be no doubt that the sign in question was a corporate one and that it relates directly to the craft initiations. Moreover, to judge by the use made of it, there is every reason to think that it was essentially a sign of mastership.

As to the meaning of the *quatre de chiffre*, which is obviously what interests us most, the authors who have spoken of it are far from agreeing among themselves, the more so in that they seem generally to be unaware that a symbol can be susceptible of several different interpretations which in no way exclude one another. There is nothing surprising in this, whatever those who keep to a profane point of view may think, for generally speaking not only is a multiplicity of meanings inherent in symbolism itself, but also, in this case as in many others, there could have been superposition and even fusion of several symbols into a single one. W. Deonna, having been led at one point to mention the *quatre de chiffre* among other symbols appearing on ancient weapons,[3] and speaking on that occasion (quite summarily, moreover) of the origin and meaning of this mark, mentioned the opinion according to which it represents what he somewhat oddly calls 'the mystical value of the figure 4'. Without rejecting that interpretation entirely, he nevertheless prefers another, and supposes that 'it is a question of an astrological sign', that of Jupiter. In its general aspect this sign does in fact resemble the figure 4; it is also certain that it can be used in a way that is related to the idea of 'mastership'; but none the less, contrary to the opinion of Deonna, we think that this is no more than a secondary association which, however legitimate it may be,[4] has merely been added to the primary significance of the symbol.

2. Elsewhere we have alluded to bonds of this kind as regards 'accepted Masons' (*Aperçus sur l'initiation*, ch. 29).

3. 'Armes avec motifs astrologiques et talismaniques' in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, July–October 1924.

4. Another instance of the same association of the symbolism of Jupiter with that of the quaternary is to be found in the fourth card of the Tarot.

There seems in fact to be no doubt that it is before all else a quaternary symbol, not so much because of its resemblance to the figure 4, which could be somehow 'adventitious', as for another more decisive reason. This figure 4, in all the marks where it appears, has a form which is exactly that of a cross of which the upper end of the vertical branch and one of the extremities of the horizontal branch are joined by a oblique line. Now it is incontestable that the cross, with no prejudice to all its other meanings, is essentially a symbol of the quaternary.[5] What further confirms this interpretation is that there are cases in which the *quatre de chiffre*, in its association with other symbols, manifestly occupies the place that is occupied by the cross in certain more common figurations, which only differ from these others in the absence of the oblique line. This is for example the case when the *quatre de chiffre* is to be seen in the figure of the 'globe of the world' or, again, when it surmounts a heart as happens very frequently in printers' marks.[6]

This is not all, and there is still something else which is perhaps no less important, even though Deonna refuses to admit it. In the article we referred to above, after having noted that some have sought 'to derive this mark from the monogram of Constantine, already freely interpreted and distorted in the Merovingian and Carolingian documents';[7] he says that 'this hypothesis appears completely arbitrary' and that 'there is nothing analogous to support it'. We are very far from being of this opinion; and it is curious, moreover, to see that among the examples reproduced by Deonna himself, there are two which represent the complete chrismon [*labarum*] in which the P (the Greek *rho*) is replaced purely and simply by the *quatre de chiffre*. Ought not this at least have urged him to greater prudence? It must be noted also that without any apparent difference of meaning two opposite orientations

5. The cross represents the quaternary under its dynamic aspect, while the square represents it under its static aspect.

6. In Christian iconography the heart surmounted by a cross is naturally the representation of the Sacred Heart, which from the symbolic point of view is an image of the 'Heart of the World'. Let it be noted that since the geometric figure of the heart is a down-pointing triangle, that of the whole symbol is nothing other than the alchemical symbol of sulphur in an inverted position, which represents the accomplishment of the Great Work. [In the article 'Le Chrisme et le cœur dans les anciennes marques corporatives', in *Regnabit*, November 1925, in connection with this same symbolic parallel, René Guénon added: 'We find here the inverted triangle, the equivalence of which with the heart and the cup we have already indicated; in isolation, this triangle is the alchemical sign of water, while the up-pointing triangle is that of fire. Now, among the different significations that water constantly has in the most diverse traditions there is one that is particularly interesting to keep in mind here: it is the symbol of Grace and of the regeneration effected by it in the being that receives it. In this respect we have only to recall the baptismal water, the four fountains of living water of the Earthly Paradise, and also the water flowing with the blood from the Heart of Christ, inexhaustible sources of Grace. Finally, and this corroborates further this explanation, the reversal of the symbol of sulphur signifies the descent of spiritual influences into the 'world below', that is, into the terrestrial and human world. It is in other words, the "celestial dew" of which we have already spoken.']

7. Care must be taken, moreover, to distinguish between accidental deformations due to the incomprehension of symbols, and intentional and meaningful deformations.

of the *quatre de chiffre* are to be found.[8] Now when turned towards the right instead of the normal position of the figure 4 which is towards the left, it is strikingly similar to the P. We have already explained[9] that the simple chrismon is to be distinguished from the so-called 'Constantinian' chrismon. The first is composed of six radii, opposed two by two and proceeding from a centre, that is, three diameters, one vertical and two oblique; and as 'Chrismon', it is said to be formed by the two Greek letters I and X. The second, which is considered as uniting in the same way the two letters X and P, is derived directly from the first by adding to the upper part of the vertical diameter a loop which changes the I (*iota*) into a P (*rho*), but which also has other meanings and which, moreover, occurs under many diverse forms;[10] this makes even less surprising its replacement by the *quatre de chiffre* which, after all, is only just such another variant.[11] All this becomes clear once it is noted that the vertical line, in the chrismon as well as in the *quatre de chiffre*, is really a representation of the World Axis. At its summit, the loop of the P is, like the eye of the needle, a symbol of the 'narrow gate'; and as to the *quatre de chiffre*, we have only to recall its relationship with the cross which has an equally axial character, and to note also that the addition of the oblique line (which completes the figure by joining the extremities of the two arms of the cross and thus closing one of its angles) ingeniously combines with the quaternary signification (which does not exist in the chrismon) the same symbolism of the 'narrow gate'; and it will be recognised that there is here something that is perfectly appropriate for a mark of mastership.

70 § Bonds and Knots

We have spoken on many occasions of the symbolism of the thread, of which there are multiple aspects, though its essential and strictly metaphysical significance is always the representation of the *sūtrātmā* which, both from

8. We say 'apparent', though it may be that they correspond to some difference of rites or of guilds. Let us add incidentally in this connection that even if the presence of a quaternary sign in the marks indicated possession of the fourth degree of an initiatic organisation, which is not impossible though doubtless difficult to establish, this obviously would not affect in any way the symbolic value of this sign.

9. 'Symbols of Analogy' [53 above].

10. We have mentioned the case in which this loop of the P takes the particular form of the Egyptian symbol of the 'ring of Horus'. In this case, the P has at the same time a particularly clear resemblance to certain prehistoric needles which, as Coomaraswamy has pointed out, instead of being perforated as they were later, were simply curved back at one end so as to form a kind of loop through which the thread was inserted [cf., 'The Eye of the Needle', 57 above].

11. As regards the chrismon of Constantine, we will point out that the initial letters of the four words of the accompanying inscription *In hoc signo vinces* give IHSV, that is the Greek name of Jesus. This seems to go unnoticed, but is expressly shown in the 'Order of the Red Cross of Rome and of Constantine', which is a *side-degree*, that is, an 'annex', of the upper grades of English Masonry.

which, both from the macrocosmic and from the microcosmic point of view, links all the states of existence one to another and to their Principle. It is of little importance, in the different forms that this symbolism takes, whether it be a thread in the literal sense, a cord, a chain, or a drawn line such as those already mentioned,[1] or a path made by architectural means as in the case of the labyrinths,[2] a path along which the being has to go from one end to the other in order to reach his goal. What is essential in every case is that the line should be unbroken. The path of the line may be more or less complicated, which usually corresponds to more particular modalities or applications of its general symbolism. Thus the thread, or its equivalent, may double back on itself so as to form intertwinings or knots; and in the structure of the whole, each of these knots represents the point of operation of the forces that determine the condensation and the cohesion of an 'aggregate' corresponding to this or that state of manifestation, so that it could be said that it is this knot which maintains the being in the state in question, and that its 'undoing' immediately brings about the being's death to that state. This is what a term such as 'vital knot' expresses very clearly. Naturally, the fact that the knots relating to different states are represented all at once and permanently in the symbolic drawing must not be regarded as an objection to what we have just said; for apart from the fact that this is obviously necessitated by the technical conditions of the representation itself, in reality it corresponds to the point of view which takes in all the states simultaneously, a point of view which is always more principial than that of succession. We will note in this connection that in the symbolism of weaving,[3] the points of intersection of the threads of the warp and of the woof, by which the entire tissue is formed, also have a similar meaning, these threads being in a way the 'lines of strength' that define the structure of the Cosmos.

In a recent article,[4] Mircea Eliade has spoken of the 'ambivalence' of the symbolism of bonds and knots, and this is a point that deserves to be examined with some attention. Naturally, it is possible to see in this a particular case of that double meaning which is quite generally inherent in symbols; but why it should exist in those particular symbols that we are concerned with here has yet to be grasped.[5] The first thing to be pointed

1. See 'Frameworks and Labyrinths' [68 above].

2. See 'The Cave and the Labyrinth' [31 above].

3. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 14.

4. 'Le "Dieu lieur" et le symbolisme des nœuds' in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, July–December 1948 (see our review in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, July–August 1949).

5. Let us point out also that in ritual and, more particularly, magical applications, a 'benefic' or 'malefic' intention as the case may be, corresponds to the double meaning of bonds and knots. But what interests us here is the principle of this ambivalence, apart from any particular application, which is never more than a mere derivation from the principle. Eliade has moreover rightly emphasised the insufficiency of the 'magical' interpretations to which some are inclined to limit themselves, because of their total failure to understand the profound significance of symbols, a failure which, as in the case of 'sociological' interpretations, entails a sort of inversion of the relationship between the principle and its contingent applications.

out in this respect is that a bond can be conceived as that which fetters or as that which unites, and even in ordinary language the word has both these meanings; corresponding to them in the symbolism of bonds, there are two points of view which can be said to be the inverse of one another; and if the most immediately apparent of these two outlooks is that which makes of the bond a fetter, it is because this is the viewpoint of the manifested being as such insofar as he considers himself as 'attached' to certain special conditions of existence and as enclosed by them within the limits of his contingent state. From this same point of view, the meaning of the knot is generally seen as a reinforcement of that of the bond, for, as we said above, the knot represents still more precisely that which fixes the being in a determined state; and the portion of the bond by which the knot is formed is, we might say, all that this being can see of the bond so long as he is incapable of extricating himself from the limits of this state, for the connection that this same bond establishes with other states necessarily still remains beyond the range of his perception. The other point of view may be termed truly universal, for it is the one that embraces the totality of states, and to understand it, we have only to refer to the idea of the *sūtrātmā*: the ligature, then considered in its full extension,[6] is what unites the multiple states, not only among themselves, but also, we repeat, to their Principle, so that far from being a fetter, it becomes on the contrary the means by which the being can actually rejoin his Principle and the very path that leads him to that goal. In this case, the thread or the cord has a truly axial value and the act of climbing up a vertical rope, or for that matter a tree or a mast, can represent the process of return to the Principle.[7] On the other hand, the connection with the Principle by the *sūtrātmā* is illustrated in a particularly striking way by the play of puppets.[8] A puppet in this context represents an individual being, and the operator who moves it by means of a thread is the Self. Without the thread, the marionette would remain inert just as, without the *sūtrātmā*, all existence would be pure nothingness and, according to a Far Eastern formula, 'all beings would be empty'.

In the very first of the two points of view of which we have just spoken, a certain ambivalence remains, which results from the different ways in which a being, according to his spiritual degree, can evaluate the state in which he happens to be, an ambivalence which language reflects quite well by the meanings given to the word 'attachment'. In fact, if one experiences attachment for someone or something, one naturally considers it an evil to be

6. It is to be understood, of course, that this extension must be considered as indefinite, even though it can never be so in fact in any possible representation.

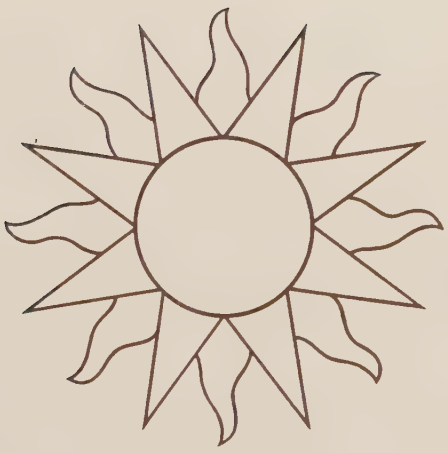
7. In India, this is the real meaning of what travellers have called the 'rope trick' [see above 65, note 5].

8. Cf., A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'Spiritual Paternity and the "Puppet Complex" ', in *Psychiatry*, August 1945 (see our review in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, October–November 1947) [also republished in *The Bugbear of Literacy*, 1949 and 1979, and in the American edition of this short collection, *Am I My Brother's Keeper?*, 1943, 1947 and other dates. Tr.]

separated from it, even if in reality this separation must entail the emancipation from certain limitations in which one finds oneself in virtue of this very attachment. More generally, the attachment of a being to his state, at the same time that it prevents him from freeing himself from the fetters that are inherent in this state, makes him consider it a misfortune to leave it; or in other terms, it makes him attribute a 'malefic' character to death to this state, death resulting from the rupture of the 'vital knot' and the dissolution of the aggregate that constitutes his individuality.[9] Only the being who has enough spiritual development to enable him to aspire, on the contrary, to a passage beyond the conditions of his state can 'realise' these conditions as the fetters that in fact they are. Thus the 'detachment' that he henceforth experiences with regard to them is already, at least virtually, a rupture of these fetters, or, to put it differently and perhaps more exactly, for there is never a rupture in the strict sense of the word, a transmutation of 'that which fetters' into 'that which unites', which fundamentally is nothing other than the recognition or the becoming conscious of the true nature of the *sūtrātmā*.

9. It is to be noted that it is commonly said that death is the 'undoing' of individual existence; this expression, which elsewhere relates also to the symbolism of the theatre, is literally exact, even though those who use it are doubtless unaware of this. [On the general symbolism of the theatre, see *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, ch. 28. The French *dénoument*, translated above as 'undoing', also has the several additional meanings of untying, untangling, upshot, or result, as well as crisis or solution. Tr.]

The Symbolism of the Heart



71 § The Radiating Heart and the Flaming Heart

In connection with 'the light and the rain',[1] and speaking of representations of the sun with alternating straight and undulating rays, we mentioned that very close counterparts of these two kinds of rays are also to be found in certain symbolic figurations of the heart. One of the most interesting examples of this that can be offered is that of the heart depicted on a small bas-relief of black marble, apparently dating from the sixteenth century, and coming from the Carthusian monastery of St Denys of Orques, which has been studied previously by Charbonneau-Lassay.[2] This radiating heart is placed at the centre of two circles upon which are inscribed respectively the planets and the signs of the Zodiac, which explicitly marks it as the 'Centre of the World' in the double sense of spatial and temporal symbolism.[3] This figuration is plainly solar; moreover, the fact that the sun (understood in the 'physical' sense) has itself a place on the planetary circle, as it normally must have in astrological symbolism, shows beyond doubt that it is in reality the spiritual Sun that the figure as a whole represents.

It is hardly necessary to recall that the correlation of sun and heart, insofar as both alike have a 'central' symbolism, is common to all traditional doctrines, of the West as well as of the East. It is thus, for example, that Proclus, addressing himself to the Sun, says: 'Occupying the midmost throne, above the ether, and having as emblem a dazzling circle which is the Heart of the World, thou fillest all with a providence apt to awaken the intelligence'.[4] We cite this text especially, in preference to many others, because of the formal mention of the intelligence that is made in it; and as we have often had occasion to explain, in every

1. [See 62 above.]

2. 'Le Marbre astronomique de Saint-Denis d'Orques' in *Regnabit*, February 1924 [and also in Charbonneau-Lassay's *Le Bestiaire du Christ*, ch. 10].

3. In this same representation there are also other details which have a great inherent interest from a symbolic point of view; thus, the heart bears a wound, or at least what has the appearance of a wound, having the form of a Hebrew *yod*, which refers both to the 'Eye of the Heart' and to the avataric 'seed' residing at the 'centre', whether this be considered macrocosmically (which is clearly the case here) or in a microcosmic sense (see *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, ch. 48).

4. *Hymn to the Sun* (translation of Mario Meunier).

tradition the heart is also considered before all else as the seat of the intelligence.[5] Moreover, according to Macrobius, 'the denomination "Intelligence of the World" responds to that of Heart of Heaven;[6] source of etherial light, the Sun is for this fluid what the heart is for the animated being';[7] and Plutarch writes that the Sun, 'having the strength of a heart, disperses and gives out from itself heat and light, as if these were blood and breath'.[8] We find in this last passage, both for the heart and for the sun, the indication of heat and light, corresponding to the two kinds of rays that we have considered; if the breath is here related to light, it is because it is in fact the symbol of the spirit which is essentially the same thing as intelligence. As to the blood, it is clearly the vehicle of the 'quickening heat' which refers especially to the vital function of the principle which is the centre of the being.[9]

In certain cases concerning the heart, the representation includes only one of the two aspects of light and heat. Light is naturally represented by radiation of the ordinary type, that is, by rectilinear rays alone; as for heat, it is most commonly represented by flames issuing from the heart. It can moreover be noted that the radiation, even when the two aspects are united, generally seems to suggest an acknowledged preponderance of the luminous aspect. This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that the representations of the radiating heart, with or without the distinction of the two kinds of rays, are the older, dating for the most part from times when the intelligence was still traditionally related to the heart, while representations of the flaming heart became wide-spread especially under the influence of modern ideas and the consequent reduction of the heart to a correspondence with sentiment only.[10] It is, in fact, only too well known that the heart has come to have no more significance than this, and that its relation to the intelligence has been entirely forgotten. The origin of this deviation, furthermore, is doubtless to

5. It is to be understood of course (and we will return to this point below), that it is pure intelligence in the universal sense that is in question here, and not reason which is only a mere reflection of universal intelligence in the individual order and which is related to the brain, the brain being the analogue in the human being of what the moon is in relation to the sun.

6. This expression 'Heart of Heaven', applied to the sun, is also to be found in the ancient traditions of Central America.

7. *On the Dream of Scipio*, I: 20.

8. *On the Face that Appears in the Orb of the Moon*, 15: 4. This text and the preceding one are cited in a note by the translator in connection with the passage of Proclus that we have just mentioned.

9. Aristotle assimilates organic life to heat, in which he is in agreement with all the Oriental doctrines. Descartes himself posits a 'fire without light' in the heart, but for him this is only the principle of an exclusively 'mechanistic' physiological theory as is all his physics, which has nothing to do of course with the traditional point of view of the ancients.

10. In this connection it is to be noted that in Christian symbolism in particular the oldest known representations of the Sacred Heart all belong to the radiating type, while in those that go back no earlier than the seventeenth century it is the flaming heart that is to be found constantly and almost exclusively. We have here a rather significant example of the influence brought to bear by modern conceptions even in the religious domain.

be imputed largely to rationalism insofar as it claims to identify intelligence purely and simply with reason; for the heart is not related to the rational faculty, but to the transcendent intellect which, precisely, is ignored and even denied by rationalism. It is true, on the other hand, that once the heart is considered as the centre of the being, all the modalities of the being can in a sense be related to it, at least indirectly, including sentiment or what psychologists call 'affectivity'. But there is every reason to observe the hierarchical relationships in all this and to uphold the true centrality of the intellect, while all the other modalities are only more or less peripheral. However, when intellectual intuition, which resides in the heart, had ceased to be recognised[11] and reason, which resides in the brain, had usurped the illuminating role[12] of the intellect, there was nothing left for the heart but the possibility of being looked on as the seat of affectivity.[13] Furthermore, the modern world had also to see the birth of what can be called sentimentalism, as a kind of counterpart to rationalism, that is, the tendency to see in sentiment what is most profound and most elevated in the being and to affirm the supremacy of this over intelligence; and it is quite obvious that such a thing, like all else that is really nothing but the exaltation of the 'infrarational' in one form or another, could not have come about except for the fact that intelligence had first been reduced to reason alone.

Now if, apart from this modern deviation, a certain relationship of the heart to affectivity is to be established within legitimate limits, this relationship must be seen as resulting directly from the heart's aspect of 'vital centre' and seat of the 'quickening heat', life and affectivity being two things very close to one another if not completely joined, while the relation with the intelligence is obviously of quite a different order. Besides, this close relationship between life and affectivity is clearly expressed by symbolism itself, which represents both alike under the aspect of heat;[14] and it is in virtue of this same assimilation, however unconsciously it may be made, that in common language one currently speaks of the warmth of sentiment or of affection.[15] It must be noted also in this connection that when fire is polarised into these two complementary aspects of light and heat, they are, so to speak, in inverse ratio to one another in their manifestation; and it is common knowledge, to take simply the point of view of physics, that the less light a flame gives the

11. It is this intellectual intuition that is duly symbolised by the 'eye of the heart'.

12. Cf., with what we said elsewhere on the rationalist sense given to the 'lights' of the eighteenth century, especially in Germany, and on the related meaning of the Illuminati of Bavaria (*Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, ch. 12).

13. Thus Pascal, contemporary with the beginnings of rationalism in the strict sense, already understands the heart exclusively in the sense of 'sentiment'.

14. It is naturally a question here of organic life in its most literal sense and not in the higher meaning in which, on the contrary, 'life' is related to light, as it is for example in the Gospel of St John (cf., *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, ch. 47).

15. Among modern people, the flaming heart is ordinarily taken to represent love not only in the religious but also in the purely human sense; this representation was altogether common especially in the eighteenth century.

hotter it is. Similarly, sentiment is really only a heat without light;[16] and one can also find in man a light without heat, that of reason, which is only a reflected illumination, cold like the lunar light which is its symbol. In the order of principles, on the contrary, these two aspects, like all complementaries, meet and are united, for they are constituents of one same essential nature. This is the case, therefore, as regards pure intelligence which belongs to the principial order; and as we have previously indicated, this further confirms that the symbolic radiation under its double form can be integrally related to it. The fire which resides at the centre of the being is indeed both light and heat; but if these two terms are to be 'translated' respectively by intelligence and love, even though fundamentally they are but two inseparable aspects of one and the same thing, it will be necessary to add, in order that this 'translation' be acceptable and legitimate, that the love in question differs from the sentiment that is named love as much as pure intelligence differs from reason.

It can be easily understood that certain terms borrowed from affectivity, as well as others, should be susceptible of analogical transposition into a higher order, for all things, apart from their immediate and literal meaning, have in fact a value as symbols in relation to more profound realities; and in particular, it is clearly so whenever there is a question of love in a traditional doctrine. Among the mystics themselves, despite inevitable confusions, affective language appears especially as a symbolic mode of expression, for however much sentiment in the ordinary sense of the word they may incontestably feel, it is nevertheless inadmissible, whatever modern psychologists may claim, that nothing should be there but purely human emotion and affection related as such to a superhuman object. In any event, the transposition becomes still more evident when one realises that the traditional applications of the idea of love are not limited to the exoteric and religious domain. They are to be found, for example, in numerous branches or schools of Islamic esoterism; and it is the same in certain doctrines of the Middle Ages, especially the traditions belonging to the Orders of chivalry,[17] and also the related initiatic doctrine which found expression with Dante and the *Fedeli d'Amore*. We will add that the distinction between intelligence and love, thus understood, has its correspondence in the Hindu tradition with the distinction between *Jñāna-mārga* and *Bhakti-mārga*, the way of knowledge and the way of love. The allusion we have just made to the orders of chivalry indicates, moreover, that the way of love is especially appropriate for the Kshatriyas, while the way of intelligence or of knowledge is naturally that which is especially suitable for Brahmins; but ultimately this is a question that bears only upon the manner of conceiving the Principle, in conformity with the difference of individual natures, nor could it in any way affect the indivisible unity of the Principle itself.

16. This is why the ancients represented love as blind.

17. It is known that the chief basis of these traditions was the Gospel of St John. 'God is love', said St John, which assuredly cannot be understood except by the transposition of which we speak here; and the war cry of the Knights Templars was *Vive Dieu Saint Amour*.

72 § Heart and Brain

In the review *Vers l'Unité* (July–August and September–October, 1926), under the signature of the Mme. Th. Darel, there is an article in which there are certain considerations that some close, in some respects, to what we ourselves have said elsewhere. Some reservations might be made about various expressions which fall short of the precision that is called for; but we do not think it will be any the less of interest to quote here several passages.

> If there is an essential movement, it is that which makes of man a vertical being, of voluntary stability, a being whose ideal impulses, whose prayers, whose purest and most elevated sentiments rise as incense towards heaven. Of this creature, the Supreme Being made a temple within the Temple, and for this endowed him with a *heart*, that is to say an immutable point of support, with a centre of movement making man adequate to his origins, similar to his First Cause. At the same time, it is true, man was provided with a *brain*; but this brain, whose innervation is a characteristic of the entire animal kingdom, is *de facto* subject to a secondary movement (with respect to the initial movement). The brain, instrument of the thought enclosed within the world and transformer of this *latent thought* for the use of man and of the world, thus makes it realisable by its mediation. But the heart alone, by a secret aspiration and expiration, allows man to remain united to his God and to be *living thought*. Thus, thanks to this royal pulsation, man preserves his promise of divinity, and he unfolds under the aegis of his Creator, careful of his law, happy with a blessed power that belongs uniquely to him, to ravish himself from himself, in turning to the secret way that leads from his heart to the universal Heart, to the divine Heart . . . Fallen back to the level of animality, however exalted he may have the right to call his animal status, man henceforth can use only the brain and its appendages. So doing, he lives only by its transformative possibilities; he lives by the latent thought spread throughout the world; but it is no longer in his power to be living thought. Nevertheless, the religions, the saints, even the monuments erected under the sign of a no longer existing spiritual order, speak to man of his origin and of the privileges which attach to it. However little he may desire it, he has only to focus his attention exclusively on the needs inherent in his relative state, and his attention can then exert itself to re-establish equilibrium within, to recover happiness . . . The excess of his deviations leads man to recognise their inanity. Out of breath, here he is, instinctively falling back upon himself, taking refuge in his own heart and, timidly, trying to descend into its silent crypt. There, the vain noises of the world are quietened. If some are still to be heard, it is because the depth has not yet been attained, the august threshold has not yet been crossed . . . The world and man are *one*. And the Heart of man, the Heart of the world are *one single Heart*.

Our readers will find here immediately the idea of the heart as centre of the being, an idea which, as we have explained (and we shall return to it again), is common to all the ancient traditions that spring from the Primordial Tradition, the vestiges of which are still to be met with everywhere by whoever knows how to see them. They will also find the idea of the fall, that cast man far away from his original centre and interrupted for him the direct communication with the 'Heart of the World' that was a normal and permanent feature of the Edenic state.[1] Finally, they will find here, as regards the central role of the heart, the indication of the double movement, centripetal and centrifugal, comparable to the two phases of respiration.[2] It is true that in the passage that we are now going to cite, the duality of these movements is related to that of the heart and of the brain, which seems at first sight to introduce some confusion, although it could also be upheld from a slightly different viewpoint, where heart and brain are considered as somehow constituting two poles in the human being.

> With man, the centrifugal force has for its organ the *Brain*, and the centripetal force the *Heart*. The Heart, seat and preserver of the initial movement, is represented in the corporeal organism by the diastolic and systolic movement which continually brings the blood, generator of physical life, back to its propelling agent, and drives it out again to irrigate the field of its action. But the Heart is still something more. Just as the sun, while diffusing the emanations of life, retains the secret of its mystical royalty, the Heart assumes subtle functions not discernable by him who is not dedicated to a life of depth and who has not concentrated his attention on the inward kingdom of which he is the Tabernacle .... The Heart, in our sense of the word, is the seat and the preserver of cosmic life. The religions that have made a sacred symbol of the Heart know this, as did the builders of cathedrals who erected the holy place at the heart of the Temple. They know it, too, who in the most ancient traditions, in the most secret rites, withdrawing from discursive intelligence, imposed silence on their brain in order to enter into the Sanctuary and there to raise themselves beyond their relative existence to the Being of being. This parallelism of the Temple and the Heart brings us back to the double mode of movement which, for the one part (vertical mode), raises man beyond himself and frees him from the process that belongs to manifestation; and for the other (horizontal or circular mode), makes him participate in this manifestation in its entirety.

The comparison of the Heart and the Temple, which is alluded to here, we had found especially emphasised in the Hebrew Kabbala;[3] and as we have already said, the opinions of certain theologians of the Middle Ages that liken

1. See 'The Sacred Heart and the Legend of the Holy Grail' [5 above].
2. See 'The Idea of the Centre in the Traditions of Antiquity' [10 above].
3. 'Le Cœur du Monde dans la Kabbale hêbraique' [treated in *The Lord of the World*, ch. 3 and in *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 4 and 7].

the Heart of Christ to the Tabernacle or to the Ark of the Covenant[4] can be related to this. On the other hand, regarding the vertical and horizontal movement, this has to do with an aspect of the symbolism of the cross, especially developed in certain Muslim esoteric schools, of which we shall perhaps speak someday.[5] It is, in fact, this symbolism that is the theme of what follows in the same article, and we shall take from it one last citation, the beginning of which can be related to what we have said about symbols of the centre, the cross in a circle, and the *swastika*.

> The Cross is the cosmic sign *par excellence*. As far back as we are able to go in time, the Cross represents that which unites, in their twofold meaning, the vertical and the horizontal. It makes the movement that belongs to them participate in a single centre, a single generator .... How can a sign susceptible of responding so completely to the nature of things not be accorded a metaphysical meaning? By becoming the almost exclusive symbol of the divine crucifixion, the Cross has but accentuated its sacred significance. Indeed, if from the beginning this sign represented the connections of the world and of man with God, it became impossible not to identify the Redemption with the Cross, impossible not to nail on the Cross the Man whose Heart is in the highest degree representative of the divine in a world forgetful of this mystery. If we made an exegesis here, it would be easy to show to what point the Gospels and their profound symbolism are significant in this respect. Christ is more than a fact, more than the great Fact of two thousand years ago. His figure is for all the ages. It rises from the tomb wherein relative man descends, to resurrect incorruptible in the divine Man, in the Man redeemed by the universal Heart which beats in the Heart of Man, whose blood is poured out for the salvation of man and of the world.

The last remark, though expressed in somewhat obscure terms, agrees fundamentally with what we have said about the symbolic value of historical facts, and especially the facts of sacred history, apart from their own reality as facts and, of course, without that reality being in any way affected; but it is not on these considerations that we propose to dwell at present. What we wish to do, taking advantage of the opportunity given us by these quotations, is to return to the question of the relationships between the heart and the brain, or the faculties represented by these two organs. We have already made some remarks on this subject[8] but we think it will not be without interest to develop it somewhat further.

4. 'Some Aspects of the Symbolism of Janus' [20 above].

5. [Cf., *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 3.]

6. 'The Idea of the Centre in the Traditions of Antiquity' [10 above].

7. 'Les Arbres du Paradis' in *Regnabit*, March 1926, p. 295 [article repeated in substance in *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 9 and 25, but the point concerning the symbolism of history is to be found in the Preface of that book].

8. 'The Radiating Heart and the Flaming Heart' [71 above].

We have just seen that in a sense one can consider the heart and the brain as two poles, that is, as complementary elements. This perspective of complementarity does in fact correspond to a reality of a certain order, at a certain level, so to speak; it is even less outward and less superficial than the point of view of opposition pure and simple, which none the less also contains a part of the truth, but only when one keeps to the most immediate appearances. With the consideration of complementarity, the opposition is already reconciled, at least up to a certain point, its two terms as it were balancing one another. Nevertheless, this point of view is still insufficient by the very fact that it none the less leaves a duality. To say that there are in man two poles or two centres between which there can be antagonism or harmony as the case may be is true when man is considered in a certain state; but is it not a state which could be called 'uncentred' or 'disunited' and which, as such, characterises only fallen man, who is—we repeat—man cut off from his original centre? It is at the very moment of the fall that Adam becomes 'cognizant of good and evil' (Genesis 3: 22), that is, he begins to consider all things under the aspect of duality. The dual nature of the 'Tree of Knowledge' becomes evident to him when he finds himself cast out of the place of the initial unity, to which the 'Tree of Life' corresponds.[9]

However this may be, it is certain that if the duality indeed exists in the being, this can only be from a contingent and relative point of view; once we place ourselves at a deeper and more essential point of view, or if we consider the being in the state corresponding to this, than the unity of this being is thereby re-established.[10] The relation between the two elements which were first apparently in opposition, then complementary, becomes something else: it is a relationship, no longer of correlation or of coordination, but of subordination. The two terms of this relationship, in fact, can no longer be placed on the same level, as if there was between them a kind of equivalence; on the contrary, one depends upon the other through having in it its principle; and such is indeed the case for what is represented respectively by the brain and the heart.

In order to make this clear, we shall return to the symbolism we have already mentioned,[11] according to which the heart is assimilated to the sun and the brain to the moon. Now the sun and the moon, or rather the cosmic principles represented by these two heavenly bodies, are often represented as complementary, and in fact they are so from a certain point of view. A certain parallelism or symmetry is then established between them, of which it would

9. See 'Les Arbres du Paradis' [cf., note 7 above]. From certain comparisons that can be established between Biblical and apocalyptic symbolism and that of Hinduism, it becomes clear that the essence of the 'Tree of Life' is in fact the 'Indivisible' (in Sanskrit *Aditi*); but this would take us too far from our subject.

10. The Scholastic adage *esse et unum convertuntur* (Being and One are interchangable) may be recalled here.

11. See the previous chapter.

be easy to find examples in all traditions. It is thus that Hermetism makes of the sun and moon (or of their alchemical equivalents, gold and silver) the image of the two principles, active and passive, or masculine and feminine according to another mode of expression, which are indeed the two terms of a true complementarity.[12] Moreover, if one considers the appearances of our world, as is legitimate, the sun and moon really have comparable and symmetrical functions, being, according to the Biblical expression, 'two great lights: a greater light to rule the day; and a lesser light to rule the night' (Genesis 1: 16); and certain Far Eastern languages (Chinese, Vietnamese, Malay) designate them by terms which likewise are symmetrical, signifying 'eye of the day' and 'eye of the night'. Nevertheless, if one goes beyond appearances, it is no longer possible to maintain this kind of equivalence, for the sun by itself is a source of light, while the moon only reflects the light that it receives from the sun.[13] The lunar light is in reality only a reflection of the solar light; one could therefore say that the moon, as 'luminary', exists only by the sun.

What is true for the sun and moon is true also for the heart and the brain or better, for the faculties to which these two organs correspond and which they symbolise, that is, the intuitive intelligence and the rational or discursive intelligence. The brain, inasmuch as it is the organ or instrument of reason, truly plays only the role of 'transmitter' and, we may say, of 'transformer'; not is it without due cause that the word 'reflection' is applied to rational thought, by which things are seen only as in a mirror, *quasi per speculum*, as St Paul said. It is not without cause either that the same root, *man* or *men*, has served to form numerous words which designate, on the one hand, the moon (Greek, *mene*, English *moon*, German *mond*),[14] and on the other hand, the rational or 'mental' faculty (Sanskrit, *manas*, Latin, *mens*, English *mind*),[15] and also, in consequence, man considered especially in his rational nature by which he is specifically defined (Sanskrit *manava*,

12. It must be noted, moreover, that, in a certain respect each of these two terms can in its turn be polarised into active and passive, whence the representations of the sun and moon as androgynes. It is in this way that *Janus*, in one of his aspects, is *Lunus-Luna*, as we have already mentioned [20 above]. It can be understood by analogous considerations that the centrifugal and centripetal forces from one point of view, may be related respectively to the brain and the heart, and that, from another point of view, both of them may be related to the heart as corresponding to the two complementary phases of its central function.

13. This could be generalised: 'receptivity' always and everywhere characterises the passive principle, so that there is not a true equivalence between it and the active principle, even though in a certain sense they are necessary to one another, since it is only in their very relationship that they are active and passive.

14. Whence also the name of *month* (Latin *mensis*, German *monat*) which is in fact the 'lunation'. The idea of 'measure' (Latin *mensura*) is also linked to the same root, as is that of division or allotment; but this would lead us too far afield.

15. Memory is also designated by similar words (Greek *mnesis*, *mnemosune*); it, likewise, is only a 'reflecting' faculty, and the moon, in a certain aspect of its symbolism, is considered as representing the 'cosmic memory'.

English *man*, German *mann* and *mensch*).[16] Reason, in fact, which is only a mediate knowing faculty, is the strictly human mode of intelligence; intellectual intuition can be called supra-human, as it is a direct participation in universal intelligence which, residing in the heart, that is, at the being's very centre where lies his point of contact with the Divine, penetrates this being from within and illuminates him with its radiation.

Light is the most common symbol of knowledge; thus solar light naturally represents direct knowledge, that is, intuitive knowledge which is that of the pure intellect, whereas lunar light represents reflective knowledge, that is, discursive knowledge which is that of the rational faculty. As the moon cannot give its light unless it is itself illuminated by the sun, so likewise reason, in the order of reality which is its own rightful domain, cannot function validly except under the guarantee of principles which enlighten and direct it, and which it receives from the higher intellect. On this point, there is a misunderstanding which it is important to dispel: modern philosophers[17] are strangely mistaken in speaking as they do of 'rational principles', as if these principles belonged rightfully to reason, or as if they were in some way the work of reason, whereas, in order to govern reason, they must on the contrary impose themselves upon it, and thus come from above. This is an example of the rationalist error, and one can understand thereby the essential difference which exists between rationalism and true intellectuality. It only needs a moment's reflection to understand that a principle in the true sense of the word, by the very fact that it cannot be drawn or deduced from something else, can only be grasped immediately, thus intuitively, and could not be the object of a discursive knowledge such as that which characterises reason. To make use here of Scholastic terminology, it is the pure intellect which is *habitus principiorum*, while reason is only *habitus conclusionum*.

Another consequence results from the fundamental characteristics of the intellect and of reason: intuitive knowledge, because it is immediate, is necessarily infallible in itself;[18] on the contrary, error can always be introduced into any knowledge that is indirect or mediate such as rational knowledge, and

16. From this, in the same way, comes the name *Minerva* (or *Menerva*) of the Etruscans and the Latins. It is worth noting that the *Athena* of the Greeks, Minerva's counterpart, is said to have issued from the brain of *Zeus*, and that she has as emblem the owl which, by its nocturnal nature, is again related to lunar symbolism. In this respect, the owl is opposed to the eagle which, able to look directly at the sun, often represents intuitive intelligence or direct contemplation of the intelligible light.

17. Let it be clearly understood that by this expression we mean those who represent the modern mentality, such as we have often had occasion to define it . . . [see especially, 'The Reform of the Modern Mentality', ch. 1 above]. The very point of view of modern philosophy and its special way of posing questions is incompatible with true metaphysics.

18. St Thomas observes, none the less (*Summa Theologica* I, q58, a5 and q85, a6), that the intellect can err in the simple perception of its true object; but this error occurs *per accidens*, because of an affirmation of the discursive order which intervenes; it is no longer, then, really the pure intellect that is in question in this case. Moreover, infallibility of course applies to the actual grasp of intuitive truths, and not to their formulation or to their translation in discursive mode.

one can thereby see how wrong Descartes was in seeking to attribute infallibility to reason. This is what Aristotle expresses in these terms:[19] 'Among the properties of intelligence,[20] in virtue of which we attain to truth, there are some which are always true, and others that can lead into error. The latter case is that of reasoning; but the intellect is always in conformity with truth, and nothing is truer than the intellect. Now, principles being better known than demonstration, and every science being accompanied by reason, the knowledge of the principles is not a science (but it is a mode of knowledge higher than scientific or rational knowledge, and it is precisely what constitutes metaphysical knowledge). Moreover, only the intellect is truer than science (or than reason which elaborates science); thus principles belong to the intellect.' And in order to affirm still more clearly the intuitive character of this intellect, Aristotle goes on to say: 'One does not demonstrate principles, but one perceives their truth directly'.[21]

This direct perception of truth, this intellectual and supra-rational intuition, the very notion of which modern man seems to have lost, is true 'heart knowledge', to use an expression frequently met with in Oriental doctrines. Moreover, this knowledge is in itself something incommunicable; it is necessary to have realised it, at least in a certain measure, to know what it really is, and all that one can say about it gives only a more or less approximate but always inadequate idea of it. Above all, it would be an error to believe that the nature of such knowledge could be truly understood by anyone who is content to look at it 'philosophically', that is, from outside, for it must never be forgotten that philosophy, like all 'profane learning' is only a purely human or rational knowledge. On the contrary, it is on supra-rational knowledge that 'sacred science' (in the sense that we have used this term in our writings)[22] is essentially based; and all that we have said of the use of symbolism and of the teaching contained in it is related to the means which the traditional doctrines place at the disposal of man to enable him to attain to that knowledge *par excellence*, with regard to which

19. *Posterior Analytics*.

20. Ordinarily one renders by 'properties' (*avoirs*) the Greek word *exis* [ἕξις] which is almost untranslatable into French, and which corresponds more closely to the Latin *habitus*, meaning simultaneously nature, disposition, state and manner of being. [Though this note relates wholly to the French text, we have retained it nevertheless as it sheds some light on the points discussed. Tr.]

21. Let us also recall the definitions of St Thomas Aquinas: *Ratio discursum quemdam designat, quo ex uno in aliud cognoscendum anima humana pervenit; intellectus vero simplicem et absolutam cognitionem (sine aliquo motu vel discursu, statim in prima et subita acceptione) designare videtur. De Veritate*, qxv, aI. ['*Ratio* designates a certain discursiveness by which the human soul from knowing one thing comes to know another; *intellectus*, however, seems to designate a simple and absolute knowledge (without any motion or discursiveness, immediately in the first and sudden apprehension).' We give the translation from the Latin as Guénon cites it, though the citation of chapter and verse do not coincide with our *De Veritate*. Tr.]

22. [See *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, Preface; and also *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, ch. 18.]

all other knowledge (in the measure that it has some reality) is only a more or less remote participation, a more or less indirect reflection, just as the light of the moon is only a pale reflection of that of the sun. 'Heart knowledge' is the direct perception of the intelligible light, of that Light of the Word of which St John speaks in the Prologue of his Gospel, radiant Light of the 'Supernal Sun' which is the true 'Heart of the World'.

73 § The All-Seeing Eye

ONE of the symbols that arecommon both to Christianity and to Masonry is the triangle in which is inscribed the Hebrew Tetragrammaton,[1] or sometimes only a *yod*, first letter of the Tetragrammaton, which in this context may be regarded as an abbreviation,[2] and which in virtue of its principial significance[3] also constitutes in itself a divine name, and even the first of all according to certain traditions.[4] Sometimes, too, the *yod* itself is replaced by an eye, generally designated as 'The All-Seeing Eye'. The likeness in shape of the *yod* and the eye can in fact lend itself to an assimilation which has numerous significations, about which, without promising to develop them fully here, it might be of interest to give at least some particulars.

First of all, it is to be noted that the triangle in question always occupies a central position[5] and that, in Masonry it is expressly placed between the sun and the moon. It follows from this that the eye within this triangle must not be represented in the form of an ordinary eye, left or right, as in reality it is the sun and the moon which correspond respectively to the right eye and the left eye of 'Universal Man' insofar as he is identified with the Macrocosm.[6] In order that the symbolism may be entirely correct, this eye must be a 'frontal' or 'central' eye, that is, a 'third eye', the resemblance of which with the *yod* is

1. In Masonry this triangle is often given the name *delta* because the Greek letter so named has in fact a triangular form. But we do not think it is necessary to see in this comparison any indication whatsoever as to the origin of the symbol in question; it is evident, moreover, that its signification is essentially ternary, while the Greek delta, despite its shape, corresponds to 4 by its alphabetical rank and its numerical value.

2. In Hebrew, the Tetragrammaton is sometimes represented by three *yod*, which have a clear link with the triangle itself. When they are arranged triangularly, they clearly correspond to the three points of the Guilds and of Masonry.

3. The *yod* is regarded as the primary element from which all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are formed.

4. See *The Great Triad*, ch. 25 on this subject.

5. In the Christian churches where it appears, this triangle is normally placed above the altar; and since the altar itself is surmounted by the cross, the combination of cross and triangle, curiously enough, reproduces the alchemical symbol of sulphur.

6. See *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 12. In this connection, and more particularly in connection with Masonic symbolism, it is to be noted that the eyes are the 'lights' which illuminate the microcosm.

still more striking; and it is in fact this 'third eye' that 'sees all', in the perfect simultaneity of the eternal present.[7] There is an inaccuracy in this respect in ordinary representations which introduce into the figure an unjustifiable asymmetry, due no doubt to the fact that the representation of the 'third eye' seems somewhat uncommon in western iconography; but anyone who understands this symbolism well can easily rectify it.

The upright triangle relates to the Principle; but when it is inverted by reflection in manifestation, the gaze of the eye which it contains appears to be directed somewhat downwards,[8] that is, from the Principle towards manifestation itself; and besides its general meaning of 'omnipresence', it then takes on more clearly the special sense of 'Providence'. On the other hand, if this reflection is thought of as being more particularly in the human being, it must be noted that the form of the inverted triangle is the same as the geometric schema of the heart:[9] the eye in its centre is then precisely the 'eye of the heart' (*'ayn al-qalb*, of Islamic esoterism), with all the meanings that are implied in this. Let it be added that it is in virtue of the eye that the heart, according to another known expression, is 'open' (*al-qalb al-maftūḥ*); this opening, eye or *yod*, can be represented symbolically as a wound, and we recall in this connection the radiating heart of St Denis d'Orques of which we have already spoken,[10] and of which one of the most remarkable particularities is precisely that the wound (or what has the outward appearance of one) takes strikingly the form of a *yod*.

This is still not all: even while representing the 'eye of the heart' as we have just said, the *yod*, according to one of its hieroglyphic meanings, also represents a seed contained in the heart, symbolically assimilated to a fruit; and this, moreover, can be understood in a macrocosmic as well as in a microcosmic sense.[11] In its application to the human being, this last remark is to be compared to the relationship of the 'third eye' with the *luz*,[12] of which the 'frontal eye' and the 'eye of the heart' represent two different localisations, and which is also the 'kernel' or the 'seed of immortality'.[13] What is again

7. From the point of view of 'triple time', the moon and the left eye correspond to the past, the sun and the right eye to the future, and the 'third eye' to the present, that is, to the indivisible 'instant' between past and future which is as a reflection of eternity in time.

8. A comparison can be made between this and the meaning of the name *Avalokitēshwara*, commonly interpreted as 'the Lord who looks downwards'.

9. In Arabic, the heart is *qalb*; and the word for 'inverted' is *maqlūb*, which derives from the same root.

10. See 'The Radiating Heart and the Flaming Heart' [71 above.]

11. See *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, ch. 48. From the macrocosmic point of view, the assimilation in question is equivalent to that of the heart to the 'World Egg'; in the Hindu tradition, the germ contained in the 'World Egg' is *Hiranyagarbha*.

12. See *The Lord of the World*, ch. 7.

13. As to symbols relating to the *luz*, we can note that the *mandorla* ('almond', which is also the signification of the word *luz*) or *vesica piscis* of the Middle Ages (cf., *The Great Triad*, ch. 2) also evokes that of the 'third eye'. The figure of Christ in glory within the *mandorla* thus appears as being identical with the *'Purusha* in the eye' of the Hindu tradition. The expression *insān al-'ayn*, used in Arabic to designate the pupil of the eye, likewise refers to the same symbolism.

very significant in certain respects is that the Arabic expression *'ayn al-khuld* has the double meaning of 'eye of immortality' and 'fountain of immortality'; and this leads us back to the idea of the 'wound', for in Christian symbolism, it is also to the 'fountain of immortality' that the double stream of blood and water escaping from the heart of Christ is related.[14] It is this 'liquor of immortality' which, according to legend, was collected in the Grail by Joseph of Arimathea; and finally, we will recall in this connection that the cup itself is a symbolic equivalent of the heart,[15] and that like the heart it is also one of the symbols which traditionally have been schematised in the form of the inverted triangle.

74 § The Mustard Seed[1]

IN connection with the symbolism of the Hebrew letter *yod* inside the heart,[2] we mentioned that in the radiating heart of the marble astronimal piece at St Denis d'Orques,[3] the wound is in the form of a *yod*, and this resemblance is too striking and too significant not to be intentional. On the other hand, in a print drawn and engraved by Callot for a thesis defended in 1625, the heart of Christ contains three *yod*. This letter, the first of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton, is always essentially the image of the Principle, whether it stands alone to represent the Divine Unity,[4] or whether it is repeated three times with a 'trinitarian' signification;[5] and it is this letter from which all the others in

14. The blood and water are here two complementaries; it could be said, using the idiom of the Far Eastern tradition, that the blood is *yang* and the water *yin* in relation to one another (on the igneous nature of the blood, cf., *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedanta*, ch. 13).

15. Furthermore, the legend of the emerald that fell from Lucifer's forehead also puts the Grail in direct relationship with the 'third eye' (cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 5). On the 'stone fallen from Heaven', see likewise *'Lapsit exillis'* [46 above.]

1. Published in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, January–February 1949. This article was written originally for the review *Regnabit*, but it could not appear there, because the hostility of certain 'neo-scholastic' circles had obliged us to cease our collaboration. It falls more especially within the perspective of the Christian tradition, with the intention of showing the perfect accord of this tradition with the other forms of the universal tradition. It completes the few indications we have given on the same subject in *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 3. We have modified it very slightly in order to clarify further several points, and especially to add references to our different works where this might be useful for readers.

2. 'The All-Seeing Eye' [73 above].

3. See the beginning of ch. 71.

4. Cf., *The Great Triad*, ch. 25.

5. The signification exists with certainty at least when the representation of the three *yod* is due to Christian authors as in the case of the print that we have just mentioned. More generally (for it must not be forgotten that the three *yod* are also to be found as an abbreviated form of the Tetragrammaton in the Judaic tradition itself), it relates to the universal symbolism of the triangle, a symbolism which, as we have also pointed out, is related to that of the heart.

the Hebrew alphabet are formed. The *yod* in the heart is therefore the Principle residing at the centre, be it from the macrocosmic point of view, at the 'Centre of the World' which is the 'Holy Palace' of the Kabbala,[6] or from the microcosmic point of view in every being, virtually at least, at his centre, which is always symbolised by the heart in the different traditional doctrines,[7] and which is man's innermost point, the point of contact with the Divine. According to the Kabbala, the *Shekinah* or the Divine Presence, which is identified with the 'Light of the Messiah',[8] dwells (*shakan*) simultaneously in the Tabernacle, for this reason called *mishkan*, and in the heart of the faithful;[9] and there is a very close relationship between this doctrine and the meaning of the name *Emmanuel*, applied to the Messiah and interpreted as 'God in us'. But there are many other considerations to develop in this respect, especially in starting from the fact that the *yod*, while having the meaning of 'principle', also has that of 'seed'. The *yod* in the heart is in a way, therefore, the seed enclosed in the fruit; there is the indication here of an identity, at least in a certain respect, between the symbolism of the heart and that of the 'World Egg', and it can also be understood thereby why the name of *seed* is applied to the Messiah in different passages of the *Bible*.[10] It is the idea of the seed in the heart which above all must hold our attention in the present context; and it deserves to do so all the more in that it relates directly to the profound meaning of one of the best known parables of the Gospel, that of the mustard seed.

In order to understand this relation, it is first of all necessary to refer to the Hindu doctrine which gives to the heart, as centre of the being, the name of 'Divine City' (*Brahmapura*) and which, quite remarkably, applies to this 'Divine City' expressions identical to some of those used in the Apocalypse to describe the 'celestial Jerusalem'.[11] The divine Principle, insofar as it is resident at the centre of the being, is often symbolically designated as 'the Ether in the heart', the primordial element from which all the others proceed being naturally taken to represent the Principle. This ether (*Akāsha*) is the same as the Hebrew *Avir*, from the mystery of which gushes forth the light (*Aor*), which realises all extent by its outward radiation,[12] 'making aught from the void (*thohū*) and from that which was not that which is',[13] while by a concentration

6. Cf., *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 4.

7. Cf., *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 3.

8. Cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 3.

9. Cf., *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 7. The residence of *as-Sakīnah* in the heart of the faithful is also affirmed in the Islamic tradition.

10. Isaiah IV: 2; Jeremiah XXIII: 5; Zechariah III: 8 and VI: 12. Cf., *Aperçus sur l'initiation*, ch. 47 and 48, and also our article on 'The All-Seeing Eye' [73 above].

11. *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 3.

12. Cf., *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 3.

13. This is the *Fiat Lux* (*Yehi Aor*) of *Genesis*, the first affirmation of the Divine Word in the work of creation—the initial vibration which opens the way to the development of possibilities contained potentially in the state 'without form and void' (*thohū va bohū*), in the original chaos. (cf., *Aperçus sur l'initiation*, ch. 46).

correlative to this luminous expansion, there remains within the heart the *yod*, that is, 'the hidden point become manifest', one in three and three in one.[14] But we will now leave to one side this cosmogonic point of view in order to give our attention by preference to the point of view which concerns a particular being such as the human being, while taking care to insist that between these two points of view, macrocosmic and microcosmic, there is an analogical correspondence in virtue of which a transposition from one to the other is always possible.

In the sacred texts of India we read: 'This *Ātmā* (the divine Spirit), which resides in the heart, is smaller than a grain of rice, smaller than a grain of barley, smaller than a grain of mustard, smaller than the kernel in a grain of millet; this *Ātmā*, which resides in the heart, is also larger than the earth, larger than the atmosphere, larger than the heavens, larger than all the worlds together'.[15] It is impossible not to be struck by the similarity of the terms of this passage with those of the Gospel parable to which we have just now alluded: 'The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field. Which is the least indeed of all seeds; but when it is grown up, it is greater than all herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come, and dwell in the branches thereof'.[16]

To this comparison, which seems to impose itself, a single objection can be made: is it really possible to assimilate to 'the *Ātmā* which resides in the heart' what the Gospel designates as the 'Kingdom of Heaven' or the 'Kingdom of God'? The Gospel itself provides the response to this question, and this response is plainly affirmative. In fact, to the Pharisees who asked when the 'Kingdom of God' would come, understanding it in an outward and temporal sense, Christ replied in these words: 'The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation. Neither shall they say: Behold here, or behold there. For lo, the Kingdom of God is within you, *Regnum Dei intra vos est*'.[17] The divine action is always exerted from within,[18] and this is why it does not at all strike one's attention, which is necessarily turned towards outward things. This is also why the Hindu doctrine gives to the Principle the epithet of 'internal co-ordinator' (*antar-yāmī*),[19] its operation being accomplished from within outwards, from the centre to the circumference, from the unmanifest to manifestation, so that its starting point escapes all the faculties which belong

14. Cf., *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 4.

15. *Chāndogya Upanishad* 3: 14.3.

16. Matthew 13: 31, 32; cf., Mark 4: 30–32; Luke 13: 18, 19.

17. Luke 17: 21. We recall in this connection, the Taoist text (already cited more completely in *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 10): 'Do not ask if the Principle is in this or that. It is in all beings. Because of that, It is given the epithet of great, supreme, entire, universal, total . . .. It is in all beings as an interpolation of [their] norm (the central point or the "invariable middle") but it is not identical with these beings, being neither diversified (in multiplicity) nor limited'. (*Chuang Tzu*, ch. 22).

18. 'At the centre of all things and higher than all, is the productive action of the Supreme Principle'. (*Chuang Tzu*, ch. 9).

19. *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 15.

to the sensible order or which proceed from it more or less directly.[20] The 'Kingdom of God', just as the 'house of God' (*Beth-El*)[21] is naturally identified with the centre, that is, with what is most inward, either in relation to the collectivity of all beings, or in relation to each in particular.

It follows clearly from this that the antithesis contained in the Gospel text—the figure of the mustard seed which is 'the smallest of all seeds', but which becomes 'the largest of all plants'—corresponds exactly to the double gradation, descending and ascending, which in the Hindu text express the idea of extreme smallness and that of extreme largeness. There are in the Gospel, moreover, other passages where the mustard seed is taken to represent what is smallest: 'If ye had faith like to a grain of mustard seed . . .';[22] nor is this unconnected with our last paragraph, for faith, by which things of the supra-sensible order are grasped, is commonly referred to the heart.[23] But what does this opposition mean, according to which the 'Kingdom of Heaven' or 'the *Ātmā* that dwells in the heart' is both what is smallest and what is greatest? Clearly this is to be understood in two different relationships; but, again, what are these two relationships? To understand this, we need only know that when passage is made analogically from the lower to the higher, from the outward to the inward, from the material to the spiritual, such an analogy must be taken in an inverse sense. Thus, just as the image of an object in a mirror is inverted in relation to the object itself, that which is first or greatest in the principial domain is, at least in appearance, the last or smallest in the domain of manifestation.[24] Generally, this application of the inverse sense is also indicated by other Gospel sayings, at least in one of their meanings: 'So shall the last be first, and the first last',[25] '. . . everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted';[26] 'Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven';[27] 'If any man desire to be first, he shall be the last of all, and the minister of all';[28] 'He that is the least among you all, he is the greatest'.[29] To limit ourselves to the case that especially concerns us here, and to make it more readily understandable, we can take terms of comparison from the mathematical order, using both geometrical and arithmetical symbolisms, between which there is perfect concordance in this respect. Thus, the geometrical point

20. The 'coordinating' action, which draws all things out of chaos (*kosmos* in Greek signifies both 'order' and 'world'), is essentially identified with the initial vibration of which we spoke above.

21. Cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 9.

22. Luke 17: 6.

23. One could even find there, especially in this respect, a certain relationship with the symbolism of the 'eye of the heart'.

24. *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 3.

25. Matthew 20: 16 and 19: 30; Mark 10: 31.

26. Luke 18: 14.

27. Matthew 18: 14.

28. Mark 9: 48.

29. Luke 9: 48.

is quantitatively null[30] and occupies no space whatsoever, even though it is the principle by which space in its entirety is produced; for space is only the development of the virtualities of the point, these being 'effectuated' by its radiation in the 'six directions'.[31] Similarly, arithmetical unity is the smallest of numbers if it is conceived as situated within their multiplicity; but it is the greatest in principle for it contains all of them virtually and produces all their series by nothing more than the indefinite repetition of itself. Likewise again, to return to the symbolism that was discussed at the outset, the *yod* is the smallest of all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, but from it, nevertheless, are derived the forms of all the other letters.[32] Moreover, the double hieroglyphic sense of the *yod* as principle and as seed is linked to this double relationship: in the lower world, it is the seed which is contained in all things. This is the point of view of transcendence and that of immanence, reconciled in the single synthesis of total harmony.[33] The point is simultaneously principle and seed of the dimensions; unity is both principle and seed of numbers; similarly, the Divine Word, depending on whether it is considered as subsisting eternally in itself or as making itself the 'centre of the world',[34] is at once Principle and seed of all beings.[35]

The Divine Principle which resides at the centre of the being is represented in the Hindu doctrine as a grain or seed (*dhātu*), as a germ (*bija*),[36] because in a way it is in this being only virtually so long as 'Union' has not actually been realised.[37] On the other hand, this same being, and manifestation in its totality to which it pertains, exist only by the Principle and have no positive reality except by participation in its essence, and insofar as they participate therein. The Divine Spirit (*Ātmā*), being the one and only Principle of all things,

30. This nullity corresponds to what Taoism calls the 'absence of form'.

31. On the relationship between point and extension, see *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 16.

32. Whence this saying: '. . . till heaven and earth pass, one jot [that is, one *iota* or one *yod*], or one tittle (a part of a letter, an elementary form assimilated to the *yod*) shall not pass of the law, till all be fulfilled' (Matthew 8).

33. The essential identity of these two aspects is also represented by the numerical equivalence of the names *El Elion*, 'God Most High', and *Emmanuel*, 'God with us' (cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 6).

34. In the Hindu tradition, the first of these two aspects of the Word is *Swayambhū* and the second is *Hiranyagarbha*.

35. From another point of view, this consideration of the inverse sense can also be applied to the two complementary phases of universal manifestation: development and envelopment, expiration and aspiration, expansion and contraction, 'solution' and 'coagulation'. (Cf., *The Great Triad*, ch. 6.)

36. In this connection, the kinship of the Latin words *gramen*, grain, and *germen*, germ will be noted. In Sanskrit, the word *dhātu* also serves to designate the verbal root, as being the 'seed' whose development gives birth to language in its entirety (cf., *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 11).

37. We say 'virtually' rather than 'potentially', because there can be nothing potential in the divine order. It is only from the side of the individual being and in relation to it that potentiality can be spoken of in this context. Pure potentiality is the absolute indifferentiation of *materia prima* in the Aristotelian sense, identical to the indistinction of the primordial chaos.

immensely surpasses all existence;[38] this is why it is said to be greater than each of the 'three worlds', terrestrial, intermediary and celestial (the three terms of the *Tribhuvana*) which are the different modes of universal manifestation. *Ātmā* is also greater than the totality of the three worlds all taken together, since it is beyond all manifestation, being the immutable, eternal, absolute and unconditioned Principle.[39]

There is still one point in the parable of the mustard seed which demands an explanation in relation to what has already been mentioned.[40] It is said that the seed, in its development, becomes a tree; now in all traditions, the tree is one of the chief symbols of the World Axis.[41] This meaning is entirely relevant here: the seed is the centre; the tree which comes from it is the axis directly issuing from this centre, and through all the worlds it extends its branches upon which the 'birds of heaven' come and repose, birds that represent, as in certain Hindu texts, the higher states of the being. This invariable axis is in fact the 'divine support' of all existence; and it is, as the Far Eastern doctrines teach, the direction according to which the 'Activity of Heaven' is exerted, the place of manifestation of the 'Will of Heaven'.[42] Is this not one of the reasons why in the *Paternoster*, immediately after the petition, 'Thy Kingdom come' (of course, it is the Kingdom of God that is in question here), comes 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven', which is an expression of the axial union of all the worlds with each other and with the divine Principle, of the full realisation of the total harmony to which we have alluded and which cannot be accomplished unless all beings combine their aspirations in a single direction, that of the axis itself?[43] 'That they may all be one', said Christ, 'even as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us ... that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one ...'.[44] It is this perfect union which is the true advent of the 'Kingdom of Heaven', coming from within and burgeoning outwards in the plenitude of universal order, the consummation of all manifestation and

38. We take the word 'existence' in its rigorous etymological acceptation: *existere* is to say *ex-stare*, to have one's being from something other than oneself, to be dependent on a higher principle; existence thus understood, therefore, is strictly contingent, relative, conditioned being, the mode of being of that which does not have its own sufficient reason in itself.

39. The 'three worlds' are not mentioned in the parable of the mustard seed, but they are represented by the three measures of meal in the parable of the leaven which immediately follows it (cf., Matthew 13: 33 and Luke 13: 20, 21).

40. Let us note also that the 'field' (*kshētra*), in Hindu terminology, is the symbolic designation of the domain in which the possibilities of a being are developed.

41. Cf., *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 9.

42. Cf., *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 23. We would readily use here the expression 'metaphysical place' on analogy with that of 'geometric place', which provides as exact as possible a symbol of what is involved.

43. It is to be noted that the word 'concord' literally means 'union of hearts' (*cum-cordia*). In this case, the heart is taken to represent primarily the will.

44. John 17: 21–3.

the restoration of the integrity of the primordial state. This is the advent of the 'celestial Jerusalem' at the end of time:[45] 'Behold, the tabernacle of God with men, and he will dwell with them. And they shall be his people; and God himself with them shall be their God.[46] And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and death shall be no more . . .'[47] 'And there shall be no curse anymore, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him. And they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads.[48] And night[49] shall be no more and they shall not need the light of the lamp, nor of the sun, because the Lord God shall enlighten them, and they shall reign forever and ever'.[50]

75 § The Ether in the Heart[1]

WE have aluded previously to what the Hindu doctrine symbolically calls 'the Ether in the heart', pointing out that what is thus designated is really the divine Principle which dwells, virtually at least, at the centre of every being. The heart, here, as in all traditional doctrines, is indeed considered as representing the vital centre of the being[1] in the fullest conceivable sense, for it is not only a matter of the corporeal organ and its physiological function, but this notion

45. In order to link this more closely to what has just been said about the symbolism of the tree, we again recall that the Tree of Life is situated at the centre of the celestial Jerusalem (cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 9, and *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 9).

46. A reference can be made here to what we have said above on the *Shekinah* and on *Emmanuel*.

47. Apocalypse 21: 3 & 4. The Celestial Jerusalem, as Centre of the World, is really identical with the 'abode of immortality' (cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 7).

48. An allusion to the 'third eye' can be seen here, this having the form of a *yod* as we have explained in our article 'The All-Seeing Eye' [73 above]: no sooner are they re-established in the 'primordial state' than they will actually possess thereby the 'sense of eternity'.

49. Night is naturally to be taken here in its lower sense, in which it is assimilated to chaos, and it is obvious that the perfection of the 'cosmos' is at the opposite of this indeterminacy (one could say 'at the other extreme of manifestation'), so that it could be considered as a perpetual 'day'.

50. Apocalypse 22: 3–5. Cf., also ibid., 21: 23: 'And the city hath no need of the sun, nor of the moon, to shine in it. For the glory of God hath enlightened it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof'. The 'glory of God' is yet another designation of the *Shekinah*, whose manifestation is in fact always represented as 'Light' (cf., *The Lord of the World*, ch. 3).

1. Like our article on 'The Mustard Seed' [the previous chapter], this one, which was to follow, had been written originally for *Regnabit*. The same comments apply here as in that case [see note 1, p. 296]. Though most of its contents will no doubt not be entirely new to readers of *Etudes Traditionnelles*, we thought that it might not be without interest for them to find these same considerations put forward once more in a somewhat different light.

2. See *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 3.

applies also, by analogical transposition, to every standpoint and in every domain within the scope of the being under consideration—of the human being, for example, as this case, by the very fact that it is our own, is obviously the one that interests us in the most direct way. Still more precisely, the vital centre is considered as corresponding to the smallest ventricle of the heart; and it is clear that this (where we again find the idea of smallness, of which we have spoken in connection with the mustard seed) acquires an entirely symbolic significance when it is transposed beyond the corporeal domain; but it must be clearly understood that, like all true and authentically traditional symbolism, it is based on reality, by an actual relationship existing between the centre, taken in a higher or spiritual sense, and the determined point of the organism which serves to represent it.

To return to the 'Ether in the heart', here is one of the fundamental texts that pertain to it: 'In this abode of Brahma (that is, in the vital centre just mentioned) there is a small lotus flower, a dwelling place in which there is a small cavity (*dahara*), occupied by Ether (*Ākāsha*); one must seek what is in this place, and one will know it'.[3] That which thus resides in the centre of the being is not simply the ethereal element, principle of the four other sensible elements, as those might believe who would stop short at the most outward meaning, that is, the one that refers only to the corporeal world in which this element does indeed play the part of principle. It is from Ether, by differentiation of complementary qualities (which become opposed in appearance in their outward manifestation), and by the rupture of the primordial equilibrium wherein these qualities were contained in an undifferentiated state, that all things in this world are produced and developed.[4] But this is only a relative principle, just as this world itself is relative, being only a particular mode of universal manifestation. It is no less true, however, that this function of Ether, insofar as it is the first of the elements, is what makes possible the required transposition. Every relative principle, by the fact that it is no less truly a principle in its own order, is a natural though more or less distant image and as it were a reflection of the absolute and supreme Principle. Indeed, it is only as a 'support' for this transposition that Ether is designated here, as the end of the text cited above expressly indicates; for if it were not a question of anything but what the text expresses literally and immediately, obviously there would be nothing to seek. What must be sought is the spiritual reality which corresponds analogically to Ether and of which Ether is, so to speak, the expression in relation to the sensible world. The result of this search is what is called the 'knowledge of the

3. *Chandogya Upanishad* 8: 1, 2 [note that in the three English translations consulted, the citation is 8: 1, 1. Tr.].

4. See our article on 'La théorie hindoue des cinq éléments' (*Etudes Traditionnelles*, August–September 1935) [This important study also was published in the posthumous collection of essays entitled *Etudes sur l'Hindouisme*, Villain et Belhomme-Editions Traditionnelles, Paris 1966; and an English translation has appeared, *Studies in Hinduism*, translated by Ian Kesarcodi Watson, Navrang, New Delhi, 1985. Tr.].

heart' (*hārda-vidyā)* and this is at the same time the 'knowledge of the cavity' (*dahara-vidyā)*, an equivalence which in Sanskrit is conveyed by the fact that the corresponding words (*hārda* and *dahara*) are formed with the same letters which are simply placed in a different order. In other words, it is the knowledge of what is most profound and most inward in the being.[5]

Just as with the designation Ether, terms such as 'lotus' and 'cavity' must also be taken symbolically. Once one goes beyond the sensible order there can no longer be any question of localisation in the strict sense of the word, inasmuch as the things in question are no longer subject to spatial conditions. Expressions relating to space and also to time then acquire the value of pure symbols; and this kind of symbolism is natural and inevitable once it becomes necessary to make use of a mode of expression adapted to the individual and terrestrial human state, a language which is that of beings actually living in space and in time. Thus these two forms, spatial and temporal, which are complementary in certain respects, are very generally and almost constantly used, either together in the same representation, or to give two different representations of the same reality[6] which, nevertheless, in itself, is beyond space and time. When, for example, it is said that the intelligence dwells in the heart, it goes without saying that there is no question of localising the intelligence, of assigning it 'dimensions' and a determined position in space. It was left to modern and purely profane philosophy, with Descartes, to raise the question, contradictory in its very terms, of a 'setting for the soul', and to claim to situate it in a certain region of the brain. Ancient traditional doctrines have assuredly never given way to such confusions, and their authorised interpreters have always known perfectly well what is to be interpreted symbolically, in full awareness of the correspondence between the diverse orders of reality, without merging one into another, and strictly observing the hierarchical division of these orders according to the degrees of universal existence. All these considerations seem moreover so obvious that we might be tempted to apologise for insisting on them so much. If we do insist, nevertheless, it is because we know only too well what the orientalists, in their ignorance of the most elementary data of symbolism, have come to make of the doctrines they study from without, never seeking to acquire a direct knowledge of them, and how, taking everything in the most grossly material sense, they deform these doctrines to the point of offering sometimes no more than a veritable caricature of them; and it is also because we know that the attitude of these orientalists is not something exceptional but, on the contrary, that it proceeds from a mentality which

5. On the subject of the cavern or cavity of the heart where the birth of the *Avatara* is accomplished, see also *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, ch. 48. [In this connection it is of great interest that in Eastern Christian iconography the Nativity is commonly represented as taking place within a cave. Tr.]

6. For example, the geometrical representation of the multiple states of the being and their representation in the form of a series of 'successive' cycles.

is, at least in the West, that of the great majority of our contemporaries and which is in fact nothing other than the specifically modern mentality itself.

The lotus has a symbolism of many aspects, and we have already spoken of some of them elsewhere.[7] In one of these aspects, the one referred to in the above quoted text, it is used to represent the different centres, even secondary centres, of the human being, either physiological (for example, the solar plexus) or, especially, the psychic centres (corresponding to the bodily plexuses in virtue of the link existing between the corporeal state and the subtle state in the composite which strictly constitutes the human individuality). These centres are called 'lotuses' in the Hindu tradition, and they are represented with different numbers of petals which likewise have a symbolic meaning, as have also the colours that are attached to them (not to speak of certain corresponding sounds, which are the *mantras* relating to various vibratory modalities in harmony with the particular faculties that are respectively governed by these centres and which in a way proceed from their irradiation, figured by the unfolding of the lotus petals).[8] These centres are also called 'wheels' (*chakras*) which, let us note in passing, still further confirms the very close relationship which (as we have noted elsewhere) exists in a general way between the symbolism of the wheel and that of flowers such as the lotus and the rose.

Another remark is called for before going any further: in this case as in all others of the same kind, it would be altogether wrong to believe that the consideration of the higher meanings is incompatible with the admission of the literal sense, that it annuls or destroys what is literal, or that it makes it somehow false. The superposition of a plurality of meanings which, far from excluding one another, on the contrary harmonise and complete each other, is a very general characteristic of genuine symbolism, as we have often explained already. If one limits oneself to consideration of the corporeal world, it is truly Ether, as first of the sensible elements, that plays the 'central' part that has to be recognised in everything that is a principle in any order whatsoever. Its state of homogeneity and perfect equilibrium can be represented by the neutral and primordial point that is prior to all the distinctions and oppositions that emanate from it and finally return to it, in the double movement of alternative expansion and concentration, expiration and inhalation, diastole and systole, of which the two complementary phases of every process of manifestation essentially consist. This is to be found moreover very precisely in the ancient cosmological conceptions of the West, where the four differentiated elements were represented at the extremities of the four branches of a cross, thus forming two opposite pairs: fire and water, air and earth, according to their participation in the corresponding pairs of fundamental qualities: hot and cold, dry and humid, in conformity with the Aristotelian theory;[9] and in certain of these figurations, what the

7. See particularly 'Symbolic Flowers' [11 above].

8. On all this, see especially 'Kundalinī-Yoga in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, October–November 1933.

alchemists called the 'quintessence' (*quinta essentia*), that is, the fifth element, which is nothing other than Ether (first in the order of the development of manifestation, but last in the inverse order which is that of reabsorption or of the return to the primordial homogeneity), appears at the centre of the cross in the form of a five-petalled rose which, as a symbolic flower, obviously brings to mind the lotus of oriental traditions (the centre of the cross corresponding here to the 'cavity' of the heart, whether this symbolism be applied from the macrocosmic or microcosmic point of view), while on the other hand, the geometrical schema on which it is drawn is nothing other than the pentagrammatic star or the Pythagorean *pentalpha*.[10] This is a particular application of the symbolism of the cross and of its centre, in perfect conformity with its general signification as we have explained it elsewhere.[11] At the same time, what has been said here about Ether must naturally be compared also with the cosmogonic theory which is to be found in the Hebrew Kabbala as regards the *Avir*, and which we have already mentioned.[12]

But in the traditional doctrines, a physical theory (in the ancient sense of this expression) can never be considered as self-sufficient; it is only a point of departure, a 'support' which makes it possible to rise up to the knowledge of higher orders by means of analogical correspondences. Moreover, this is one of the essential differences existing between the standpoint of sacred or traditional science and that of profane science as conceived today. That which dwells in the heart, therefore, is not only Ether in the literal sense of the word; in so far as the heart is the centre of the human being considered in its integrality and not in its corporeal modality alone, what is in this centre is the 'living soul' (*jīvātmā*), containing in principle all the possibilities which are to be developed in the course of individual existence, just as the Ether contains in principle all the possibilities of corporeal or sensible manifestation. It is very remarkable, with regard to the concordances between the Eastern and Western traditions, that Dante also speaks of the 'spirit of life, which dwells in the most secret chamber of the heart',[13] precisely in this same cavity of which the Hindu doctrine speaks; and what is perhaps most worthy of note is that the expression which he uses here, *spiritu della vita*, is as literal a translation as possible of the Sanskrit term *jīvātmā*, though it is most unlikely that he should have had any means of knowing this.

This is not all: that which relates to the 'living soul' as dwelling in the heart only concerns, at least directly, an intermediary domain, constituting what may rightly be called the psychic order (in the original sense of the Greek

9. On this also we shall refer to our article, already mentioned above, on 'La Théorie hindoue des cinq éléments' for further details.

10. We will recall that such a figure, clearly of a Hermetic and Rosicrucian character, and which is in fact that of the *Rota Mundi*, was placed by Leibniz at the beginning of his treatise *De Arte combinatoria* (see the Foreword to *Les Principes du calcul infinitésimal*, 1946).

11. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 7.

12. See 'The Mustard Seed', [the previous chapter].

13. *In quel punto dice veracemente che lo spirito della vita, lo quale dimora nella segretissima camera del cuore ....* (*Vita Nuova*, 2).

word *psuchē*), and which does not go beyond the consideration of the human individuality as such. It is necessary, therefore, to rise again from this to a higher meaning, that is, the purely spiritual or metaphysical meaning; and it need scarcely be said that the superposition of these three meanings corresponds exactly to the hierarchy of the 'three worlds'. Thus, what resides in the heart, from a first point of view, is the ethereal element, but not this alone. From a second point of view it is the 'living soul', but not this alone either, for what is represented by the heart is essentially the point of contact of the individual with the universal, or in other words, of the human with the Divine, a point of contact naturally identified with the very centre of the individuality. Consequently, it is necessary to introduce here a third point of view, which may be called 'supra-individual' because, by expressing the relationship of the human being with the Principle, it thereby goes beyond the limits of the individual condition, and it is from this point of view that it can at last be said that what resides in the heart is *Brahma* itself, the divine Principle from which proceeds all existence and on which it entirely depends, and which, from within, penetrates, sustains and illumines all things. Ether also, in the corporeal world, can be considered as producing all and penetrating all, and this is why the sacred texts of India and their authorised commentaries offer it as a symbol for *Brahma*.[14] That which is designated as the 'Ether in the heart', in the most exalted sense, is therefore *Brahma*, and consequently 'heart knowledge', when it attains its most profound degree, is truly identical with the 'divine knowledge' (*Brahma-vidyā*).[15]

The divine Principle, moreover, is considered as somehow dwelling at the centre of every being, which agrees with what St John says when he speaks of 'the true Light which enlightens every man coming into this world'. But this 'divine presence', assimilable to the Hebrew *Shekinah*, may be only virtual, in the sense that the being may not actually be conscious of it. It becomes fully actualized for that being only when he has become conscious of it and has 'realised' it by 'Union', understood in the sense of the Sanskrit *yoga*. The being then knows by the most real and the most immediate of all knowledge, that the '*Ātmā* which dwells in the heart' is not simply the *jīvātmā*, the individual and human soul, but is also the absolute and unconditioned *Ātmā*, the divine and universal Spirit, and that the one and the other, in this central point, are in an indissoluble and inexpressible contact; for in truth they are but one, just as, according to the saying of Christ, 'my Father and I are one'. He who has actually reached this knowledge has truly attained the centre and not only his own centre, but thereby also the centre of all

14. '*Brahma* is like Ether, which is everywhere and which simultaneously penetrates the outside and the inside of all things' (Sankaracharya, *Ātmā-Bodha*).

15. This divine knowledge itself can still be of two kinds, 'non-supreme' (*apara*) or 'supreme' (*para*), corresponding respectively to the celestial world and to that which is beyond the 'three worlds'. But this distinction, despite its extreme importance from the point of view of pure metaphysics, need not be brought into our present context any more than the distinction between the two different degrees in which, correlatively, 'Union' itself can be envisaged.

things. He has realised the union of his own heart with the 'spiritual Sun' which is the 'Heart of the World'. The heart envisaged in this way is, according to the teaching of the Hindu tradition, the 'divine City' (*Brahmapura*); and, as we have already indicated, this is described in terms similar to those which the *Apocalypse* applies to the Celestial Jerusalem, which is indeed itself also one of the representations of the 'Heart of the World'.

76 § The Divine City

We have already often spoken of the 'divine city' (*Brahma-pura* in the Hindu tradition).[1] What is truly means is, of course, the centre of the being, represented by the heart which does in fact correspond to it in the corporeal organism, and this centre is the dwelling place of *Purusha*, identified with the divine Principle (*Brahma*) considered as the 'internal co-ordinator' (*antar-yāmī*) who rules the entire collectivity of this being's faculties by 'non-acting' activity which is the immediate consequence of his mere presence. The name *Purusha* is for this reason interpreted as meaning *puri-shaya*, that is, he who resides or reposes (*shaya*) in the being as in a city (*pura*). This interpretation obviously derives from *Nirukta*, but Coomaraswamy has remarked that it could at the same time also represent, exceptionally for such cases, a true etymological derivation;[2] and this point, because of the parallels it suggests, deserves further attention.

First of all, it is to be noted that the Greek *polis* and the Latin *civitas*, which designate the city, by their roots correspond respectively to the two elements from which the word *puru-sha* is formed, even though this may not be immediately apparent because of certain phonetic changes which take place from one language to another. In fact, the Sanskrit root *pri* or *pur* becomes, in the European languages, *ple* or *pel*,[3] so that *pura* and *polis* are strictly equivalent. This root expresses the idea of plenitude, from the qualitative point of view (Sanskrit *puru* and *pūrna*; Greek *pleos*; Latin *plenus*; English *full*), and from the quantitative perspective, that of plurality (Greek *polus*; Latin *plus*; German *viel*). Obviously a city does not exist except by the gathering together of a plurality of individuals who inhabit it and who constitute its 'population' (the word *populus* being likewise of the same origin), which could already justify the use, for its designation, of terms such as those under

1. See *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 3; cf., also 'The Mustard Seed' and 'The Ether in the Heart' [ch. 70 and 75 respectively].

2. 'What is Civilisation?' we borrow from this study a part of the considerations that follow, especially those concerning the linguistic perspective. [This Coomaraswamy study first appeared in *Albert Schweitzer Jubilee Book*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1946. Tr.]

3. The letters r and l, as is commonly known, are very close to one another phonetically and are easily interchanged.

discussion. But this is only the most outward aspect, and what is much more important, with a view to probing to the depth of things, is the idea of plenitude. In this respect, it is known that the plenum and the void, considered as correlatives, are one of the traditional representations of the complementarity of the active and passive principles. In the present case, it can be said that *Purusha*, by his presence, fills the 'divine City' and all its extensions and dependencies, that is, the whole being which, without this presence, would be only an empty 'field' (*kshetra*) or, in other words, a pure potentiality deprived of any actualised existence. It is *Purusha* who, according to the Upanishadic texts, enlightens 'this all' (*sarvam idam*) by his radiation, this being the image of his 'non-acting' activity by which all manifestation is realised according to the very 'measure' that is determined by the actual extent of this radiation,[4] just as in the symbolism of the Apocalypse in Christianity, the 'celestial Jerusalem' is enlightened in its entirety by the light of the Lamb who dwells in its centre 'as sacrificed', and therefore in a state of 'non-action'.[5] We can add further, in this connection, that the sacrifice of the Lamb 'from the foundation of the world' is really the same thing as the Vedic sacrifice of *Purusha* dividing himself in appearance at the origin of manifestation in order to dwell simultaneously in all beings and in all worlds,[6] so that even while being always essentially one and containing all principially in his very unity, outwardly he appears as multiple, which again corresponds exactly to the two ideas of plenitude and of plurality mentioned just now; and this is also why it is said that 'there are two *Purushas* in the world, the one destructible and the other indestructible; the first is shared out among all beings, the second is immutable.[7]

On the other hand, the Latin *civitas* derives from a root, *kei*, which in Western languages is the equivalent of the Sanskrit *shī* (whence *shaya*). Its primary sense is that of repose (Greek *keisthai*, to be recumbent), of which that of stable residence or of stable abode (as in a city) is only a direct consequence. *Purusha*, reposing in the 'divine City', can be said to be its sole 'citizen' (civis),[8] as the multitude of inhabitants who 'people' it really exist only by him, being produced entirely by his own light, and animated by his own breath (*prāna*), luminous rays and vital breath being in this context nothing other than two aspects of the *sūtrātmā*. If one considers the 'divine City' (or the 'Kingdom of God' which is 'within us', according to the Gospel) in its strictest sense, as being above all the very centre of the being, it goes without saying that it is *Purusha* alone who dwells there in reality;

4. See *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, ch. 3.

5. We will recall further that the manifestation of the *shekinah* or 'divine presence' is always represented as a light.

6. See 'Gathering what is Scattered' [48 above].

7. *Bhagavad Gītā* 15: 16; according to the continuation of this text, *Purushottama*, who is identical with *Paramātmā*, is beyond these two aspects for he is the supreme Principle, transcendent in relation to all manifestation; he is not 'in the world', rather all worlds are in him.

8. The equivalent Greek expression, *monos politès*, was applied to God by Philo.

but the extension of this term to the total being, with all its faculties and all its constituent elements, is also legitimate for the reasons we have just explained, and this extension changes nothing in that respect, since it all depends entirely on *Purusha* and even derives its whole existence from him. The being's vital functions and faculties, in their relationship with *Purusha*, are often compared to the subjects or servants of a king, and there is among them a hierarchy similar to that of different castes in human society.[9] The palace where the king resides and from which he directs all, is in the centre or the heart of the city,[10] its essential part, all the rest being in a sense no more than prolongations of this centre or 'extensions' (a sense also contained in the root *kei*); but of course subjects are never in a state of absolute dependence with respect to their king, as is the case with what is symbolised here, because even though the royal function is unique in the city and the situation of the 'governor' is essentially different from that of the 'governed',[11] the king himself is nevertheless a human being like his subjects, and not a principle of another order. Thus, another and more exact image is that offered by the play of marionettes, as these are animated only by the will of a man who makes them move as he wills (and the thread by which he makes them move is, naturally, yet another image of *sūtrātmā*). A particularly striking myth relating to this is found in the *Kathā-Sarit-Sāgara*.[12] This describes a city populated entirely by wooden automata which behave in every way as living beings except that they lack speech. At the centre is a palace where dwells a man who is the 'sole consciousness' (*ēkakam chītanam*) of the city, and the cause of all the movements of the automata, which he himself has made; and it is to be noted that this man is said to be a carpenter, which assimilates him to *Vishvakarma*, that is, to the divine Principle insofar as it makes and orders the Universe.[13]

This last remark leads us to specify that the symbolism of the 'divine City' admits of a macrocosmic as well as a microcosmic application, even though it is the microcosmic application which we have considered almost exclusively

9. This point of view has been especially developed by Plato in his *Republic*.

10. In the beginning, this palace was at the same time a temple. This double character is still to be found in 'historical' times, and we call attention here in particular to the example of the *Ming-Tang* in China (see *The Great Triad*, ch. 16).

11. In their relationship, the 'governor' is 'in act' and the 'governed' are 'in potency', according to Aristotelian and Scholastic language. This is why, in the traditional conception, the King and his kingdom are in the relationship of an active principle and a passive principle. But the King, on the contrary, insofar as he exercises temporal power, becomes in his turn the passive principle in relation to the spiritual authority (cf., Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government* [American Oriental Series, American Oriental Society, New Haven, Connecticut, 1942].

12. See Coomaraswamy, 'Spiritual Paternity and the "Puppet Complex"' in *Psychiatry*, August 1945.

13. See 'Maçons et Charpentiers', *Etudes Traditionnelles*, December 1946 [republished in the posthumous collection of essays and reviews *Etudes sur la Franc-Maçonnerie et le Compagnonnage*, vol. II, Paris, Editions Traditionnelles, 1964 Tr.].

in all that has preceded. One could even speak of several macrocosmic applications at different levels, according to whether it is a question of a particular world, that is, of a determined state of existence (and the symbolism of the 'celestial Jerusalem' refers in reality to this case), or of the entirety of universal manifestation. In all these, whether it be the centre of a world or the centre of all the worlds that is considered, there is in this centre a divine Principle (*Purusha* dwelling in the sun, which is the *spiritus Mundi* of the Western traditions) which, for all that is manifested in the corresponding domain, plays the same part of 'internal co-ordinator' as that played by the *Purusha* residing in the heart of each being for all that is included in the possibilities of that being. There remains only to transpose (without any other modification, in order to apply it to the multitude of manifested beings) that which, in the 'microcosmic' application, is said of the different faculties of a particular being; the symbolism of the sun as the 'Heart of the World'[14] explains, moreover, why the *sūtrātmā* which links each being to the central *Purusha* is then represented by the 'solar ray' called *sushumnā*.[15] The various representations of the *sūtrātmā* also show that the apparent division of *Purusha*, in the macrocosmic as well as in the microcosmic orders, must not be conceived as a fragmentation, which would be in contradiction with his essential unity, but rather as an 'extension' comparable to that of the rays proceeding from the centre; and at the same time, as the *sūtrātmā* is likened to a thread (*sūtra*) by its very designation, the symbolism is also closely related to that of weaving.[16]

There is still one more point to be made, albeit briefly: to be legitimate and valid from the traditional point of view, that is, to be truly 'normal', the constitution and organisation of every city or human society must take the 'divine City' for model as far as possible; we say 'as far as possible', for in the present conditions of our world at least, the imitation of this model (which is strictly speaking an 'archetype') is bound to be always imperfect, as is shown by what has already been said about the comparison of *Purusha* with a king; but however that may be, it is only in the measure that this is realised that we have the right, strictly speaking, to talk of 'civilisation'. It is enough to say that all that is spoken of in the modern world as 'civilisation', all that one likes to think of as 'the civilisation' *par excellence*, could only be considered as a caricature of true civilisation, and it often goes

14. Needless to say, this does not concern 'the sun that all men see', but rather the spiritual sun 'that few men know by the intellect' (*Atharva Veda* 10: 8.14), which is represented as being immovably at the zenith.

15. Cf., *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, ch. 20; this 'solar ray' is also the same thing as the 'golden cord' of which Plato speaks.

16. See *The Symbolism of the Cross*, ch. 14. We will recall here especially the symbolism of the spider at the centre of its web, an image of the sun whose rays are emanations or 'extensions' of itself (as the web of the spider is formed of its own substance), constituting as it were the 'texture' of the world, which they actualise in the measure that they extend in all directions from their source.

so far as to be its exact opposite in many respects. Not only does an anti-traditional civilisation such as that of the modern world not really deserve the name of civilisation, but in all rigour, it is even the very antithesis of true civilisation.

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(Abbreviations: *R* = *Regnabit*, *V.I.* = *LeVoile d'Isis*, *E.T.* = *Études Traditionnelles*, *C.S.* = *Cahiers du Sud.*)

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The following list is arranged in chronological order; additional bibliographic details will be available in major libraries, and certainly in the National Union Catalog (USA). Where an English translation exists, only the English language title, in italics, is given. An asterisk follows the title in the case of the author's major works. From 1921, when Guénon's first two books appeared, the principal titles have been kept in print almost without interruption.

Le Théosophisme: histoire d'une pseudo religion
Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines
L'Erreur spirite
East and West
L'Esoterisme de Dante
*Man and His Becoming according to the Vedanta**
*The Crisis of the Modern World**
The Lord of the World
Saint Bernard
Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporelle
*The Symbolism of the Cross**
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Etudes sur la Franc-Maçonnerie et le Compagnonnage
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RENÉ GUÉNON (1886-1951) is without doubt one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century. Frithjof Schuon has said of him that he had 'the central function of restoring the great principles of traditonal metaphysics to Western awareness', and he added that Guénon 'gave proof of a universality of understanding that for centuries had no parallel in the Western world'. Many of Guénon's books have appeared in English, including *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*, *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedanta*, *The Crisis of the Modern World* (all 1945), *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* (1953), *The Symbolism of the Cross* (1958), and *The Multiple States of Being* (1984). A translation of *The Great Triad*, first published in French in 1946 and the last of the author's books to appear in his lifetime, was published by Quinta Essentia in 1991.

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